



Improving Integration of International Students: Case Study ESN Laurea

Anastasia Sevalneva

2020 Laurea



Laurea University of Applied Sciences

Improving Integration of International Students: Case Study ESN Laurea

Anastasia Sevalneva
Degree programme in Restaurant
Entrepreneurship
Bachelor's Thesis
June, 2020

Anastasia Sevalneva

Improving Integration of International Students: Case Study ESN Laurea

Year	2020	Pages	57
------	------	-------	----

The main purpose of this research thesis is to determine the current integration issues faced by the international students at Laurea University of Applied Sciences. The secondary objective is to map how Erasmus Student Network Laurea can help with improving the integration situation. ESN Laurea is a non-profit organisation that focuses on supporting international students of the university. It was founded and is run by the students of Laurea, including the author of this thesis.

This thesis introduces Erasmus Student Network as an international organisation, including its structure, history and mission. More focus is given to the case company, ESN Laurea. Being a founding member of this organisation allowed the author to thoroughly explain its history, activities and goals. Moreover, theory of integration and culture is researched with the use of books, articles and online sources and they are presented in this thesis.

The main research methods used in this thesis are semi-structured interviews and a survey. Some of the data were gathered from the face-to-face interviews conducted with an international officer of Laurea, as well as with a group of international students. The questions asked included ones about the respondents' experiences with internationalization, integration and activity of school organisations. More data were gathered with an online survey, answered by 42 Laurea students.

The outcome of this thesis reports the current issues that the international students of Laurea face in terms of their integration process. It became evident which areas need improvement, such as having more intermixed courses with the local students, information and guidance provided during the introduction week, as well as a growing demand for cultural events. Based on that knowledge, ESN Laurea is given recommendations on how to use its existing platform in helping the international students.

The recommendations are based on the opinions and suggestions shared by the respondents of the interviews and survey, as well as the theoretical framework and conducted research. ESN Laurea, as well as other student organisations of Laurea UAS, are encouraged to use the results of this thesis while planning their activities.

Keywords: ESN, integration, international, students

Table of Contents

1	Introduction	5
2	Erasmus Student Network.....	6
2.1	Erasmus Student Network in the world	6
2.2	Erasmus Student Network Laurea	8
2.2.1	History of ESN Laurea	8
2.2.2	Role of ESN Laurea in Laurea UAS.....	10
2.2.3	ESN Laurea's networking and cooperation	12
2.3	SocialErasmus project and volunteering	13
3	Integration of international students	15
3.1	Integration as a concept.....	16
3.2	Integration and culture	17
4	Research methods and implementation	21
4.1	Interview theory	21
4.2	Interview with international officer of Laurea UAS.....	22
4.3	Group interview with international students of Laurea UAS	23
4.4	Survey	24
5	Outcome of the research.....	24
5.1	Individual interview results	25
5.2	Group interview results	28
5.3	Survey results.....	30
5.4	Open question of the survey. Results	40
6	Recommendations.....	41
6.1	Courses and intermixing	41
6.2	The introduction week	41
6.3	Social events.....	42
7	Conclusion	43
	References	45
	Figures	47
	Appendices	48

1 Introduction

As travelling the world becomes more affordable and the culture of internationality gains its popularity with the people from all the backgrounds, more and more students choose to pursue their education abroad. A lot of universities across the Earth offer their programmes and degrees taught in English as a common language and invite international students to join the locals. However, more research show that just the fact of a university having a diverse and multicultural student body doesn't mean that those students are well-adapted and integrated (Spenser-Oatey, Dauber & Williams 2014). Of course, a university might have hundreds and even thousands of students from every part of the world, but how well are they adjusted to studying and living in a new environment?

The objective of this thesis is to develop a set of recommendations on improving the students' integration process, done by researching the current situation and climate in the international community within Laurea UAS. These recommendations will serve as practical guidelines for Erasmus Student Network Laurea and other student organisations of the university, along with the staff of Laurea UAS. Close cooperation with ESN, student union Laureamko and officials of Laurea UAS will allow the author of this thesis to get in-depth understanding of the current integration progress at the university.

Erasmus Student Network Laurea is the case company for this thesis. It is a student association in Laurea University of Applied Sciences which focuses on supporting international students and is a company which was created in collaboration with the author of this thesis. It will also provide the needed tools and a stable base to develop an efficient set of recommendations as the outcome of this research.

In this research thesis the author will examine social and cultural integration, as well as explain the work of ESN Laurea and its importance for Laurea's community. The theory on the integration and culture will be researched using printed materials such as books and articles, as well as materials found online. The information about ESN will be mainly gathered from the author's years of work in the association and gained experience. The insight on the integration situation within the university will be gathered through interviews and a survey, focusing on the opinions of the international students and staff of Laurea UAS.

This thesis includes five main chapters, in addition to the introduction and conclusion. Chapters two and three will focus on the history and role of Erasmus Student Network, as well as the theory of social and cultural integration. Chapters four and five will describe the research methods used in this thesis, as well as present the gathered data. In chapter six the author will use all the information gained during the work on this thesis and present the solutions to the stated goals.

2 Erasmus Student Network

Erasmus Student Network (or, shortly, ESN) is the biggest student association in Europe, according to the official ESN website. It was born on the 16th of October 1989 and legally registered in 1990 to support and develop student exchange and mobility. Currently Erasmus Student Network works with and offers its services to 350,000 students in the world, while having almost 15,000 active members who are developing the association. (Erasmus Student Network 2019.) These people are mainly volunteering, which means they are willing to spend their time and energy to bring a change to the world and improve the experience of international students.

The main goal of ESN is to create a more mobile and flexible environment in universities and world through supporting and developing the student exchange. The following subchapters will focus on history, structure and operation of ESN, as well as its impact on the students and society in the world, Finland, and the case university - Laurea UAS.

2.1 Erasmus Student Network in the world

As the official Erasmus Student Network website states, ESN is present in more than 1000 Higher Education Institutions of 40 countries, which include Finland, United Kingdom, Germany, Spain, Italy and many more. The association is constantly developing and expanding. At the moment of the publication of this thesis, ESN has around 13,000 active members. In addition to this number, in many sections they are supported by tutors or so-called buddies, getting the overall number of the members up to 34,000. These buddies are mainly taking on the role of a peer tutor, introducing the incoming students to the host university, country and culture. (Erasmus Student Network 2019.)

As the readers can see from Figure 1, ESN is mainly operating on 3 levels: local, national and international. The local level includes all the local sections as well as their boards and members. Generally, a local section can be an ESN section of a Higher Education Institution (e.g. ESN Laurea, ESN Uni Helsinki, ESN Metropolia) or a city (e.g. ESN Joensuu, ESN Oulu, ESN Lappeenranta). A national board represents the whole country (e.g. ESN Finland, ESN Italy, ESN Russia) and supports and guides its local sections. Every national board has its national representatives, who all together form the Council of National Representatives and serve as a link to the international level, representing their country and communicating the opinions and votes of the local sections during the international meetings. And last, but not the least, the international level is operated by its own international board, secretariat and various committees. This international level is responsible for decision-making on the matters that affect all the existing ESN sections on all levels. (Erasmus Student Network 2019.)

Structure

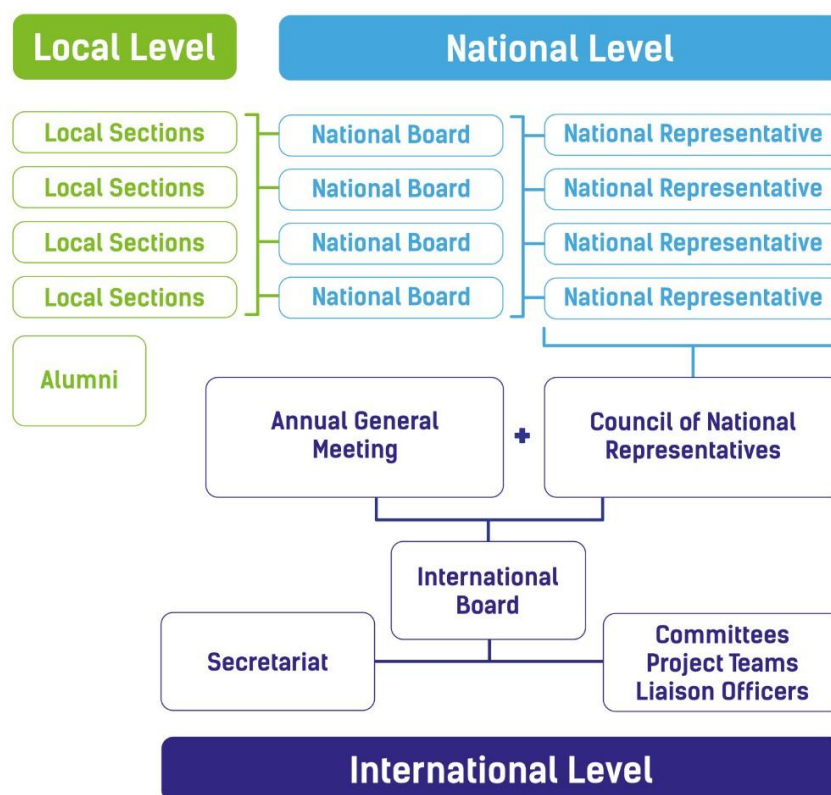


Figure 1: ESN structure (Erasmus Student Network 2017)

The main focus group of Erasmus Student Network is the current exchange students. When moving to a new country, they often feel abandoned and face adaptation problems, especially if it's their first experience being far from home (Erasmus Student Network 2019.) That is the reason why ESN offers help for their integration in social, academic and practical fields. Often it can be done through various activities provided by local ESN sections, including such social and cultural events as film nights, language learning projects, trips to interesting places within and outside the country, international food festivals and last, but not least, student parties. Adding to all that, many local sections have adopted a tutor or mentor program, which helps the incoming international students to familiarise with more practical and academic matters. (Erasmus Student Network 2019.)

Erasmus Student Network also provides support to the students who have finished their period abroad and are coming back to home university. They are being guided in their reintegration process by providing international environment. As a lot of existing local sections have been founded by former exchange students, they can better understand and respond to the possible issues and challenges of a foreign environment that the students are facing. Some of the sections were also set up by the international students who had a great time during their

exchange period or, alternatively, because they faced lack of support or help during their time abroad. (Erasmus Student Network 2019.)

2.2 Erasmus Student Network Laurea

Erasmus Student Network section in Laurea UAS was established in May 2017 by 3 people, including the author of this thesis. The current board of 2019-2020 still includes the author of this thesis for the position of a section's treasurer. Being within this association for more than 2 years since its first days, the author of this thesis was able to get a full insight on ESN Laurea's operation, structure, networking and its work within Laurea university.

The following subchapters are based on the author's observations and experience during their work in ESN Laurea. Further the readers can get information about ESN Laurea's history and the reason behind its creation, its role in Laurea UAS, as well as the association's networking and plans for the future operation.

2.2.1 History of ESN Laurea

First set up in May 2017 by 3 international degree students, ESN Laurea was their hope for the better English-speaking environment within Laurea UAS. As non-Finnish speakers, the founders felt lack of cultural events, study offers and guiding available for them. When the founders discovered the existence of Erasmus Student Network and studied the available materials on this organisation, they decided to set up a local section in Laurea, since it didn't exist before. Laurea UAS didn't have a specialised association or a body to cater to the needs of exchange and international students specifically. Of course, the university operates an International Office, and the student tutors of Laureamko do their best to support the incoming international students every semester, but something was missing. Coming from 2 different degree programmes - Business Management and Restaurant Entrepreneurship, the founders have consulted their student peers. It was discovered that the international students often felt left out of the activities organised by the existing associations of Laurea. The students explained that the marketing materials for the events were often available exclusively in Finnish.

Having contacted the National Board of Finland several times and having had a physical meeting with them in summer 2017 in Helsinki, the founders of ESN Laurea have decided to take one more step towards becoming an official part of Erasmus Student Network. The 3 founding members, including the author of this thesis, have joined the National Platform of ESN Finland in the city of Tampere which was held from 13th to 15th of October 2017. National Platforms consist of 3 days of plenaries, workshops, elections and getting to know other ESN sections of the country. During one of the days the founding members of ESN Laurea have shared their work with the other sections, told about their aspirations on becoming an official section and plans for the upcoming years. As a result of voting, 16 sections out of 16 have voted for approval of ESN Laurea as a Candidate Section.

A Candidate Section has much more interaction with the national level (ESN Finland), gets support and advice on how to operate the work, handle events and how to overall improve in order to become not just a candidate, but an official section and part of Erasmus Student Network. Since October 2017 ESN Laurea Candidate Section became more active and visible in Laurea UAS, as it now was participating in the activities organised by the student union of the university (Laureamko). The new duties included supporting the incoming students during the introduction week in January of 2018 together with the Laurea tutors, as well as cooperating with the other ESN sections of Helsinki region.

Officially ESN Laurea was accepted as a part of Erasmus Student Network during the National Platform in the city of Lappeenranta on 11th of March 2018 in a result of voting. From 9th to 11th of March 2018 all member sections of ESN Finland gathered in Lappeenranta to discuss topics important for ESN Finland, make decisions affecting all present sections and hold elections for the new National Board. One of the main topics in the agenda was the election of ESN Laurea as an official section.

On the second day of the plenaries, 10th of March 2018, the board members of ESN Laurea, including the author of this thesis, presented the work and achievements of the section. During the 15-minute presentation they talked about the operation of ESN Laurea, the events that were held for the international students, cooperation with Laurea UAS, budget and finances, relationship with the student union Laureamko and plans for the future. After the presentation was concluded, all present members of 16 ESN sections of Finland, as well as the National board of Finland, had a chance to ask questions and give comments. The question round lasted 15 minutes, the questions raised included ones about the financing of ESN Laurea and its events, board's inner work and potential lack of volunteers (on the moment of presentation ESN Laurea's board consisted only of 4 people), cooperation with the university to get more support, possible grants and many more.

On the third day of the event, 11th of March 2018, all 16 sections of Erasmus Student Network Finland voted on whether ESN Laurea should become an official section or remain a Candidate Section. 15 sections voted for accepting ESN Laurea, while 1 section voted against it. Thus, following the absolute majority in the voting, ESN Laurea has become the youngest and 17th local ESN section in Finland, and 5th in Helsinki region, joining ESN sections of University of Helsinki, Aalto University, Metropolia and Haaga-Helia. The National Platform has gathered almost 100 people from different corners of Finland for 3 days (Figure 2), and the outcomes were a new elected National Board, ESN Laurea becoming an official part of the Network, new knowledge gained through various workshops and, of course, new friends.



Figure 2: ESN sections of Finland during National Platform Lappeenranta on 11th of March 2018 (ESN Finland 2018)

Since March 2018 ESN Laurea has been operating as an official section. Now the students of Laurea could join not just the local events, but also the national event of ESN Finland - the most international cruise to Sweden - Pirates of the Baltic Sea, where the participants can meet up to 2000 other exchange students from all Finland (Erasmus Student Network Finland 2019). In addition to that, with the official status members of ESN Laurea gained the opportunity to represent their section during international ESN events - such as the Annual General Meeting which gathers ESN volunteers from all over the world. It also became possible to implement the official brand identity of Erasmus Student Network, including colours, logotypes and templates, which increased the recognition amongst students as well as the feeling of belonging.

2.2.2 Role of ESN Laurea in Laurea UAS

When defining social activity in this thesis, the author focuses on organising and participating in university's self-government bodies, student volunteering and participating in student associations' activities. Such activity allows the students to develop personal and interpersonal qualities, as well as professional and creative abilities. For many students combining classroom studies and volunteering helps them to gain actual experience and thus enhance their employability. (Barton, Bates & O'Donovan 2019.)

One of the roles and goals of Erasmus Student Network Laurea is promotion and development of social activity within the university. Providing the students with various options in different fields to volunteer and participate in university's life, at the same time developing their own qualities and skills. Event management - one of the most common activities for ESN Laurea and other student associations of Laurea - can help in developing time management, team management, networking, communication skills, compromising when necessary and so on. Apart from that, ESN Laurea together with other ESN sections of Finland provides opportunities for trainings in finance, leadership, project management and social inclusion. ESN sections together with the SocialErasmus projects also organise volunteering groups to visit

animal shelters, help refugees and war or disaster victims, recycling household items and clothes, charity bake sales etc. More information about the SocialErasmus project can be found further in this thesis.

The other goal of ESN Laurea is creating a more international atmosphere within Laurea, which also includes the expansion of study course offers available in English. Considering the average annual amount of 650 incoming international students, which includes both exchange students (about 400 every year) from the partnering universities all over the world and the ones seeking a Bachelor's or Master's degree, one would expect more focus on their needs. Most of the elective courses offered by Laurea are conducted in Finnish, even when having an English title and description, which can be considered misleading. These courses include such essentials as "Cultural Encounters and Supporting Integration", "Sexuality - Everyone's Right?", "Different Stages of Human Life", "Ups and Downs in a Relationship", "Tame Your Performance Anxiety", "Psychodrama Growth Group" and many more. As can be seen from the names, some of them focus on psychology, mental health, dealing with stress and development of coping mechanisms. When trying to find alternatives for such courses which are conducted in English, the author of this thesis could only find 2 - "Stress Tolerance" and "Improving Your Study Skills and Finding Your Strengths". (Laurea curriculum 2019.)

As described further in this thesis in the chapter about integration, international students face relatively high amounts of stress during their time abroad, especially on the first year, often due to alienation, new surroundings, language barrier and the need to live on their own. The author of this thesis strongly believes that there should be more courses available for English-speaking students experiencing such struggles. One of the goals of Erasmus Student Network Laurea is to help advocating students' needs and create a communication channel with the school's representatives. Ideally, working together with Laurea UAS to create a stronger support for the students in a form of an elective course or a series of guidelines, and provide help for the ones who seek it.

As for the leisure part, local student organisations and clubs, such as Laurea Entrepreneurship Society, Jenkins and Laureamko - the student union of Laurea UAS - offer a great deal of after-school activities. From club parties to student cruises, pub crawls and hangouts - there are happenings almost every week during the academic year. These are all great activities to enjoy Finnish student culture and meet new people, together with adjusting to the new surroundings. However, the author of this thesis would like to note that the ratio of party events involving the consumption of alcohol and calmer or more cultural hangouts is not even. What could be introduced is more board game nights, possible LAN parties, movie nights, nature hikes, company visits, international dinners, sport events and tournaments, talent contests etc. Such events can help to create a stronger sense of community together with providing a

safe space to express oneself. ESN Laurea is actively working on providing more such opportunities for students, introducing new ideas every semester.

2.2.3 ESN Laurea's networking and cooperation

ESN Laurea is being supported by the National Board of ESN Finland, which can always help out with an advice on how to manage one or another part of being in the Network, provide financial support for the projects or events, or just check up on how the things are going in the section. Once a month ESN Finland gathers the Council of Local Representatives, where each ESN Finland section is being represented by one person. Usually these meetings are conducted online via Skype due to the physical distance and time resources. During the Council each section shares their experience, tells about the previous month and its events, can ask for advice and so on.

ESN Laurea works closely with other 4 ESN sections of Helsinki region, which also includes ESN University of Helsinki, ESN Metropolia, ESN Aalto and ESN Haaga-Helia. Together these sections plan joint events, promote each other's activities, have board members hangouts etc. As all mentioned above sections have been established many years ago and ESN Laurea is the youngest amongst them, they also provide guiding and support, using their previous experience and knowledge.

ESN Laurea cooperates with Laureamko and other student organisations of Laurea UAS. The first year from establishment of ESN Laurea was challenging, as there was quite a lot of misunderstanding between the associations. Often the members of ESN Laurea were reporting hostility or neglect from the representatives of other associations of Laurea, their unwillingness to compromise, use a common language (English) or have an event together. On the second year of ESN Laurea's presence in the school it was revealed that some of Laureamko's board members were seeing ESN Laurea as a potential rival and a source of threat. It was fair to assume that, since even though the founding members of ESN Laurea have never intended to compete with existing organisations, it was only a matter of time before some of Laureamko's members would join ESN activities instead. While losing the participants for an event, the organisation also loses potential source of income and a volunteer.

When this misunderstanding was discovered, ESN Laurea has approached Laureamko with an offer to talk things through. As a result of that, the sections have introduced a contract, which allowed to reduce the possible misconceptions and create a more relaxed and healthier atmosphere. Following this document, Laureamko and ESN Laurea will have guidelines for their future cooperation and promotion of each other's activities, making working together easier and more transparent.

As a part of Laurea UAS, ESN Laurea is being represented during student gatherings, such as the introduction week activities and tutoring, Freshman parties, Overall Baptising Day, Amazing Race competition and more. Most of the time ESN and other organisations would host a so-called task point, coming up with a task to compete for the participating students in exchange for points, that are counted at the end of the event. Starting from the Fall 2019, ESN Laurea and Laureamko also started to have several events per semester that are planned and conducted together. For example, in Autumn 2019 one of the new co-events was a traditional dining Finnish student event - a Sitsit - which has been held completely in English for the first time in Laurea's history. In the future ESN Laurea plans on more collaboration with Laurea UAS, including the planning of new students' integration activities.

2.3 SocialErasmus project and volunteering

Erasmus Student Network is actively promoting being socially active to the students all over the world. One of the bigger international projects of ESN is the SocialErasmus. It aims to promote the active social attitude to the students through volunteering activities, creating a positive social change. As can be seen from the Figure 3, the SocialErasmus project has been around since 2008, when it was established in Poland. Starting in 2010, the project became international, as more and more ESN sections adopt the SocialErasmus practices. (SocialErasmus 2019).

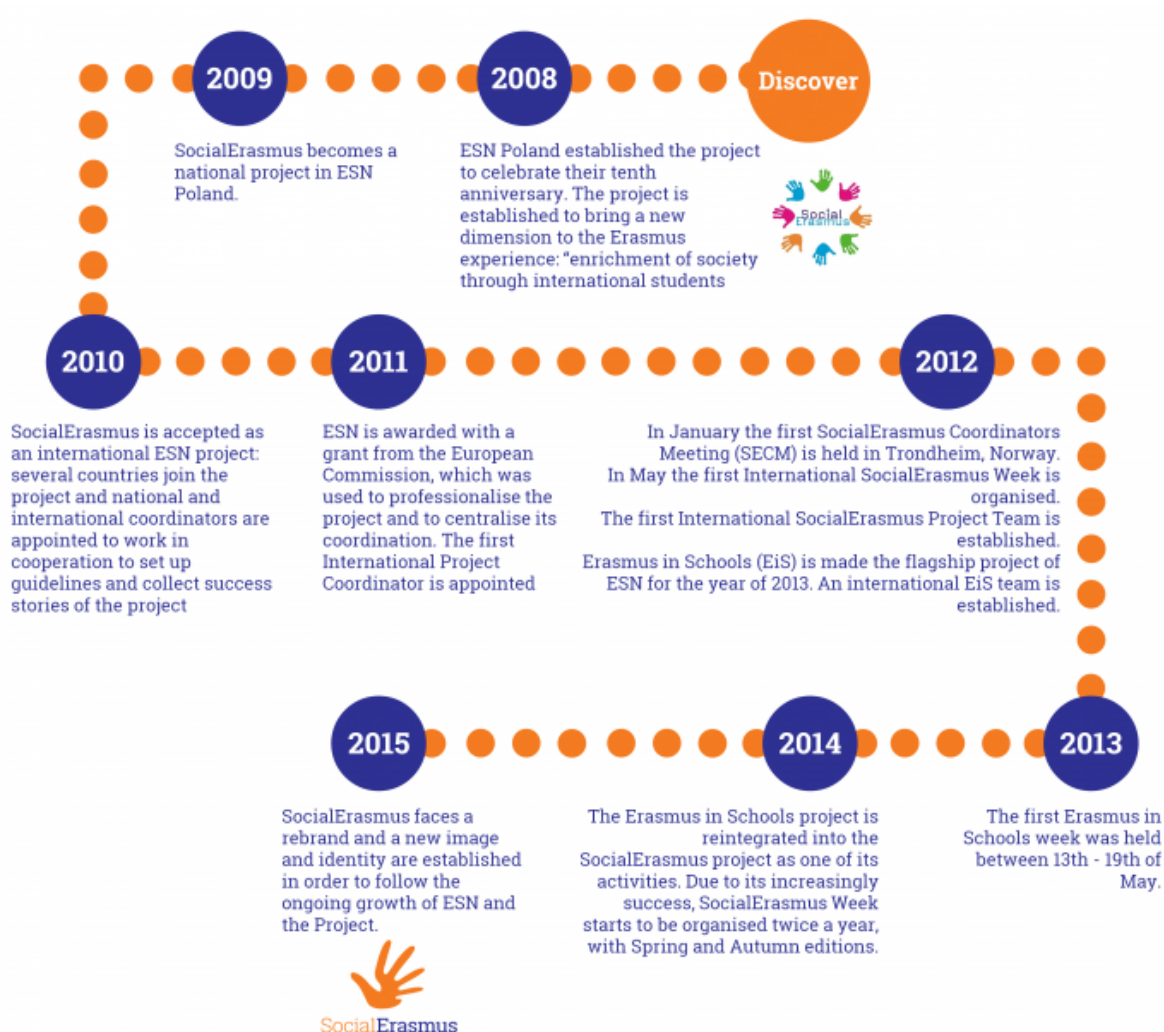


Figure 3: SocialErasmus project timeline (SocialErasmus 2016)

Projects like SocialErasmus aid the students in connecting with the local communities through volunteering and help them to leave a positive mark. Getting to know the society's problems and trying to solve them is a life-changing experience for the students, as it shows them the realities different from their own and the fact that they can leave an impact and improve someone's life through small acts. Working together and for the local community as a volunteer helps the student to better integrate in it and see the situation from a perspective of a local, and not as an outsider, as well as creating a positive social change. (SocialErasmus 2019.)

The main goal of this project is to enrich the exchange and international students' experiences, while helping them to understand the modern society's issues and come up with possible solutions. SocialErasmus promotes awareness of such causes as poverty, disasters, discrimination, education, environment, health, violence and animals. Twice a year the project

holds a Social Inclusion Days campaign, which is 2 weeks of various social inclusion events. Every ESN section is encouraged to participate, and anyone interested can join the activities.



Figure 4 Social inclusion days statistics (SocialErasmus 2017)

Often these include helping the local society through volunteering - visiting and supporting animal shelters, visiting and helping veterans, raising awareness on disabilities, fighting for human rights, arranging food stations for people who can't afford it, collecting food, medical necessities and other items for disaster or war victims and many more. As can be seen from the Figure 4, only in 2 weeks of 2017 the Social Inclusion Days have attracted over 15000 participants in more than 30 countries. This number is growing every year. (SocialErasmus 2019.)

3 Integration of international students

According to Paige, Cohen, Kappler, Chi and Lassegard (2014), the international students in universities all over the world generally experience more struggle than their domestic school-mates. Cultural shock, language barrier, homesickness and isolation are just the tip of an iceberg.

Integration of the students, especially the ones who are coming from abroad, is a definitive factor that can benefit the student in terms of enhancing their academic performance, interpersonal skills and the awareness of different cultures. Moreover, successful integration also will support and profit the development of the educational institution and the whole country. (British council 2014.)

The following subchapters will introduce the reader to the concept of integration, as well as social and cultural differences that the students may face during their time abroad.

Moreover, they will acknowledge problems that the international students may encounter when moving to a different country.

3.1 Integration as a concept

Spenser-Oatey, Dauber and Williams (2014) argue that in the case of modern universities the process of integration can and should involve the whole student community. Not only teachers and tutors, but also student associations and unions together with domestic students - they all must work together to create a better and more receptive environment for the international students.

According to Spenser-Oatey et.al. (2014), integration is a “process of intermixing, personal adaptation, mutual adjustment and change, and a sense of belonging”. It is a process that doesn’t happen overnight, it takes time and energy to do so, and it involves both the people from the hosting university and the incoming student to make it work. It is also important to state that just having a multicultural student body in a university or professors coming from different countries is not nearly enough to claim that the university is truly international. In fact, without proper integrational process the students, if coming from different cultures, are likely to keep to their own smaller groups. They cannot be forced to intermix and socialise with each other. However, if properly implemented, this process can be helped. (Spenser-Oatey et.al. 2014.)

For successful integration, one of the most important factors are frequent contact and participation in activities together, as well as the quality of interaction. Getting genuine, empathetic and positive interactions are significantly enhancing the chance of integration, making strong connections and the overall wellbeing of a student. It shows that personal emotions play an important role in intercultural relations. That is why possible negative experiences might also affect the process of integration. It includes acts of discrimination, language barrier and prejudices. (Spenser-Oatey et.al. 2014.)

Successful integration can affect many aspects of the student’s life. From the mental and emotional side to academic success, employability and personal motivation. High levels of integration create a so-called sense of belonging. It can be defined as the feeling of being a part of the student society and university, being supported and feeling safe and content. According to the research conducted in universities of the USA, the higher sense of belonging was, the stronger it affected student’s success in their studies, as well as their ability to make international friends and connections. These effects were observed in both domestic and international students. (Glass & Westmont 2014.)

The same study has discovered the effects of inclusive and international classes and courses on overall integration. According to it, the more students were engaged in studies involving

international students, the higher and more positive was their level of intercultural interactions and experiences. It means that studying together with people of different cultures will help in making cross-cultural connections. Furthermore, participating in non-academic activities, such as student events, trips, parties, sport gatherings and tours (in intermixed groups) has proven to positively affect the sense of belonging to the student community. (Glass & Westmont 2014.)

Positive integration can significantly lower stress and anxiety the international student might experience, increase their feeling of achievement, as well as fitting well within the university's and even county's community. Moreover, if conducted right, integration will increase the person's intercultural and global skills through encountering and dealing with cultural differences, adapting to them and finding ways to work together. (Spenser-Oatey et.al. 2014.)

When coming to study in a new country and before integration, students face many challenges and stress factors. In their "Students' Guide", Paige, Cohen, Kappler, Chi and Lassegard (2012, 4) highlight 10 most important and common stress factors for international students. It is recommended getting familiar with these challenges and possibly come up with coping strategies to make the international experience smoother and more productive. The main stress factors are cultural differences, ethnocentrism, cultural immersion, cultural isolation, language, prior intercultural experience, expectations, visibility and invisibility, status, and, at last, power and control (Paige et.al. 2012, 5). Each of these challenges also represent opportunities and possible new intercultural skills, if handled right. That's why it's crucial for students travelling abroad to do a proper research before their trip and review these stress factors. If a person knows what to expect, they are often more comfortable when dealing with unpleasant situations. Moreover, Paige et.al. (2012, 7) highly encourage the students to revisit this list of challenges during the whole time abroad, as the experiences might differ throughout the studies.

3.2 Integration and culture

Culture is a multidimensional concept. It refers to and embodies peoples' beliefs, values, customs, history, arts and much more. Culture can be described as everything, that a group has created together and what is shared within this group (Paige et.al. 2012, 43). Culture also affects social norms and the way people communicate and act. Getting to know others' culture during the study period abroad is what makes it so interesting and exciting. Meeting new people, learning about them and from them and sharing one's own culture in exchange - all this will also lead to understanding both others and one better.

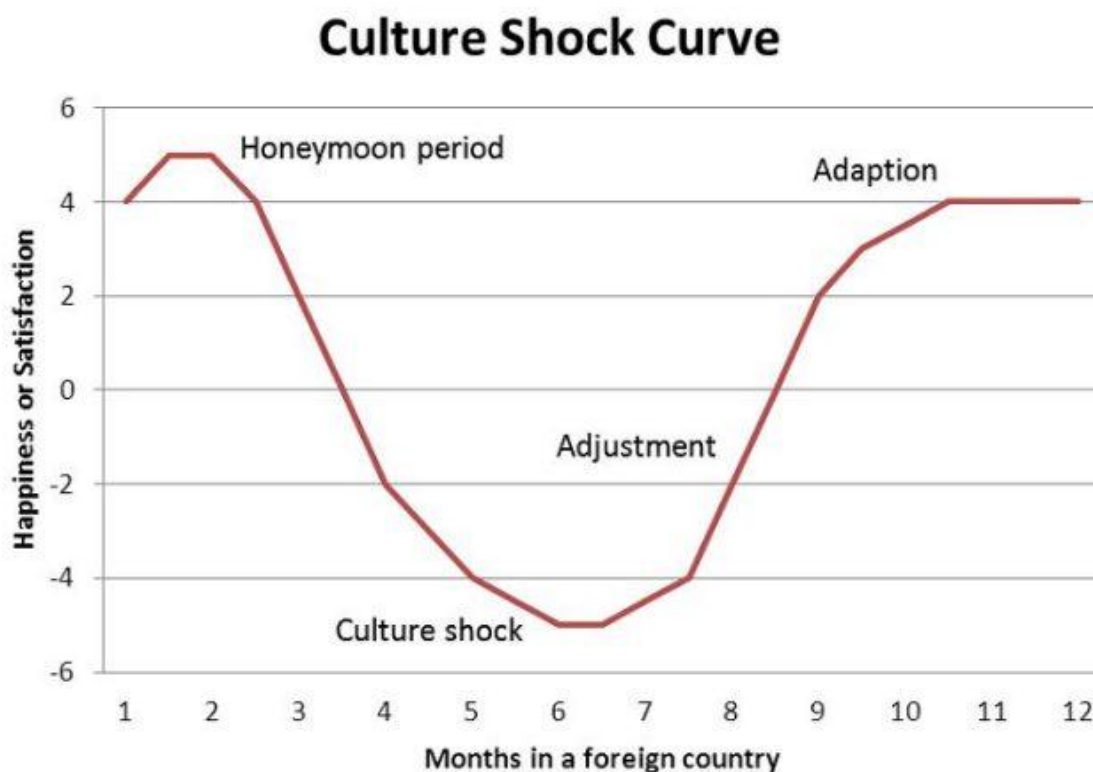


Figure 5: Culture shock and adjustment U-curve (Madrid Metropolitan 2017)

“The Student’s Guide” also introduces the concept of different stages of adjustment (Paige et.al. 2012, 92). As the authors describe it, for most people coming to live abroad their experiences form a so-called “U-curve”, which can be observed from the Figure 5. At the very start of studies abroad, an international student is experiencing a cultural euphoria. Everything surrounding them seems so new and different, they get to try new food, see new beautiful sceneries, discover new places and meet new interesting people. Every day for the new-comer is filled with exciting events. For a short-term tourist this stage might last for the whole trip, as they are more focused on entertainment than other aspects of living in a new country. (Paige et.al. 2012, 92.)

Second stage, according to Paige et.al. (2012,93), is cultural confrontation. Often referred to as the cultural shock, this stage is a complete opposite of the first one. New situations and cultural differences start to cause frustration instead of excitement. Homesickness, being unable to speak the language of the host country, alienation, new strange customs and facing adult problems and bureaucracy cause immense stress. The new student often starts to question their decision to move and loses faith in their ability to adapt. All these factors combined, if not assisted, can cause severe anxiety and depression, affect the student’s life, health and studies and ruin their international experience. (Paige et.al. 2012, 93.)

The third stage is presenting cultural adjustment. The new student is coming to terms with new surroundings, getting more confident in their skills and dealing with new situations. While obtaining more knowledge about their host country, they start feeling more relaxed as now they know better of what to expect and how to act. (Paige et.al. 2012, 93.)

The fourth and last stage of the cultural adjustment is cultural adaptation. The international student now knows how to survive and how their host city works. They create own daily routines and become comfortable with being in a new culture, adapting to it. The values, behaviours and customs of the local people are now integrated into the student's everyday life, expanding the intercultural skills and personal horizons. (Paige et.al. 2012, 93.)

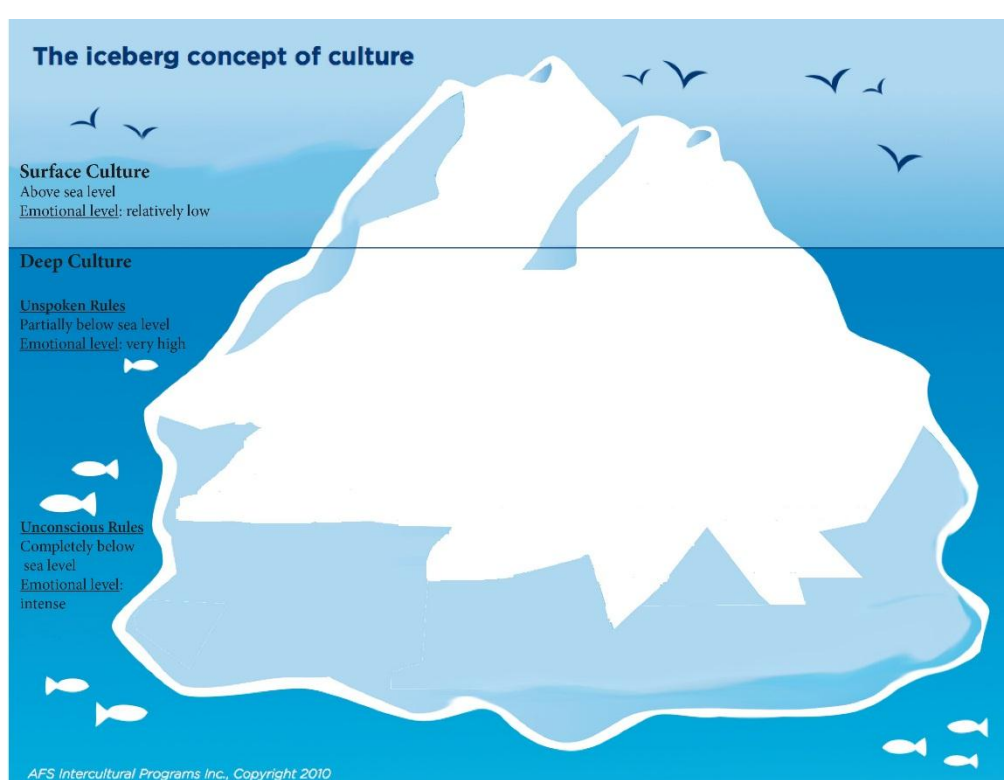


Figure 6: The "Cultural iceberg" (SOPTV ED, 2017)

Any culture shares its own differences and similarities to others. Some of them can be clearly seen from a quick interaction, but most of the cultural aspects are situated much deeper. As can be seen from Figure 6, a culture can be presented in a form of an iceberg. Following this allusion, only a relatively small part of the culture is above the "sea level" and can be easily observed. According to Paige et.al. (2012, 50), the commonly observable culture aspects can be: clothing (e.g. style, colors, what is considered acceptable to wear in different situations, traditional/religious clothing etc.), food, methods of worship, art and architecture, views on personal space and eye contact, language, celebrations and folklore.

The deeper part of culture is normally not so obvious and includes peoples' beliefs, values and cultural norms. As Paige et.al. (2012, 51) explain further in the "Student's guide", such concepts as work ethic, views on equality and gender roles, humor, concept of justice, views on healthcare and education, religious beliefs, rules of politeness and the concept of beauty can all be placed in the category of the "deep culture". These deeper aspects can be used to explain the surface culture, as they are closely correlated. For example, the clothes that people wear may as well depend on the religious beliefs, opinion on equality and concept of beauty. This means that even some obvious things that can be observed often have a deeper and more important cultural value. Understanding these deeper aspects can help with integrating into the new culture and understanding the people who share it. (Paige et.al. 2012, 51.)

Having a multicultural community in a university or a workplace comes with its own challenges and communication barriers. People with different cultural backgrounds naturally come to the use of stereotypes. Now stereotype as a phenomenon is not inherently "bad", often it helps to prepare for the new environment by creating expectations and easing the cultural shock. Nevertheless, stereotypes can and will negatively affect the cross-cultural communication by creating an invisible barrier (Hofstede, Hofstede, Pedersen 2002, 18). That is why it is so important to make an effort to improve own awareness of the culture's differences, learn about them and try to see the situation from the other person's cultural perspective. Being open to the new experiences and ready to change the stereotypical interpretation of a person's behavior is a crucial step in genuine integration. (Hofstede et.al. 2002, 19.)

Another barrier created when communicating across cultures is the ubiquitous tendency of judging and trying to evaluate someone's actions as "good" or "bad". Based on own cultural upbringing and absorbed bias, people tend to apply their own cultural values to the actions of others. To help with overcoming this tendency of rating people's behavior it is advised to recognize that changing someone's or own culture is impossible over a few days, and instead of judging someone, it's better to try learning their cultural values as well as understanding where their actions and behaviors are coming from. (Hofstede et.al. 2002, 19.)

Another typical barrier described by Hofstede et.al. (2002, 19) is the high level of stress that is often observed during interactions across different cultures. People often react with stress to unfamiliar situations, especially if it involves unknown customs and a language that's difficult to understand.

All these factors are often present in the international students' lives. Helping them to overcome it, learn from it and flatten the curve of the culture shock are crucial for their successful integration.

4 Research methods and implementation

The following subchapters will introduce the reader to the research methods used in this thesis. They will describe the procedures followed during the conducted interviews.

4.1 Interview theory

The research methods that will be used in this thesis are mainly qualitative, in form of individual or group in-depth interviews. The focus group of the interviews are both international and domestic students of Laurea University of Applied Sciences, as well as staff of the school. The interviews and surveys can be carried out in traditional face-to-face way, or electronically via online questionnaires, email conversations and calls. The preference will be given to the face-to-face meetings, since generally they are more inviting and personal, helping the participants to share their thoughts. Moreover, some existing data will be used with the permission of authorities of Laurea UAS, such as questionnaires from previous semesters, allowing to understand the real level of students' satisfaction, interest in participating in social activities, their opinion on international interactions and more. All used data will be presented in a strictly confidential way. It means none of the facts added to this thesis will reveal the identity of respondents.

In general, an interview can be called a process of a personal information and experiences exchange between two parties - the interviewer and respondent (Ruane 2015, 192). For a good interview an important nuance will be creating a comfortable atmosphere for the respondent to share their thoughts. Such feeling of trust and ease during the meeting is called a rapport (Ruane 2015, 192). To create a good rapport the interviewer must present as an active listener, be open and friendly and show good social skills. It means not only read prepared questions from the list but create a pleasant social situation for the respondent.

The author of this thesis has chosen to use semi-structured interviews for research, since they allow to discover and understand personal thoughts and experiences of the respondent. As the aim of this thesis is to help with integration of international students in Laurea UAS, such a tool that allows to hear real students' stories and their point of views will help to gather more relevant and accurate data.

Semi-structured interviews are normally conducted face-to-face. They do demand more time and effort in comparison to more quantitative methods, like surveys or structured interviews (Adams 2015, 493). The interview session has to be carefully planned, finding suitable time and meeting place for both the interviewer and respondent. During the session the interviewer has to be an active participant, encouraging the respondent and being a good listener. To get a large enough sample, it is not enough to conduct one or two interviews - there has to be more, if the goal is to cover a whole focus group (Adams 2015, 493). After the interview is done, it is important to carefully reread all the notes that has been taken and check the

electronical recording, if it has been done as well. After doing so, the received materials need to be analysed.

For semi-structured interviews a common practice would be creating a so-called interview guide. Such guide is normally presented as a list of topics to be covered, and not structured questions with answer options to choose from. This gives an opportunity for the respondent to speak more of their mind and gives freedom to take the interview session where the participant wants to take it (Ruane 2015, 193). When creating the interview guide, it is important to take into consideration such aspects as the background of the respondent, their knowledge base, possible connection to the research topic etc.

One of the challenges that semi-structured interviews present is keeping the respondent from wandering off the topic (Ruane 2015, 194). There is no doubt that letting them talk freely can reveal more potentially relevant information, so knowing when to carefully nudge the participant towards the topic of interest is a skill that needs to be developed. When conducting an interview, the interviewer as well has to make sure the respondent fully understands the topic and questions and is capable of answering them in the context of research. It helps to provide more focused results and saves time for the both parties involved.

4.2 Interview with international officer of Laurea UAS

Before continuing with further research on the topic of the thesis, the author has decided to interview the international manager A. of Laurea UAS's international office. The interview was conducted in a semi-structured way to get more in-depth understanding on the Laurea UAS's point of view on the topic of integration and the current situation in the school.

In order to conduct the interview, the author has contacted the manager A. via email, with an invitation and a preliminary list of questions attached. Both parties agreed to begin the interview on 17th of April 2019, at 12:30 in one of the rooms of Laurea UAS, Leppävaara campus. Before starting with questions, the author made a quick introduction and explanation of the topic of the thesis and why it was important to her. After getting the consent to record the session with a voice recorder, the question round began. For the interview the author of this thesis has used open-ended questions in order to get more informative answers, instead of using the close-ended questions that can be answered simply with "yes" or "no". During the interview the participants were leading an open dialogue, organically moving from one question to another.

In a span of the interview the atmosphere in the room was friendly, allowing to share honest opinions and thoughts on the integration of international students. Questions asked and answered included ones about already existing options in Laurea UAS for assisting students, ways that various student organisations (e.g. Laureamko, ESN Laurea etc.) can help, possible

social integration activities, previous practices that have been abandoned, personal observations and ideas for the future implementation. Most of these questions were prepared beforehand and available for the respondent to familiarize with in a form of the interview guide (Appendix 1). However, due to an open structure, the author had an opportunity to ask more questions on a whim. It allowed the author to explore the topic more in-depth and get an honest opinion on the situation, instead of sticking to the structure.

4.3 Group interview with international students of Laurea UAS

Continuing the research, the author of the thesis decided to conduct an interview with the students of Laurea UAS. It was done in order to get direct opinions and thoughts of the students themselves - the focus group which wellbeing this thesis is aiming to improve. The decision to have a group interview instead of an individual one is based on the author having limited time and resources. Moreover, when engaging in a group conversation a lot of respondents feel more comfortable with sharing their opinions, especially the ones that are negative or criticizing. Talking about negative experiences one-on-one with the interviewer may be perceived as intimidating, threatening and overall uncomfortable, even when a friendly atmosphere has been established. A group interview in this case helps the participants to ease, as it may feel more like a friend gathering while joking and talking about their problems.

The group interview was conducted on the 16th of April 2019, after one of the international competence classes. Overall 4 international students participated in the session, which lasted 1 hour 30 minutes. 2 respondents were degree students, studying in English programmes, and 2 others were exchange students. Before the interview began the author and the participants had an opportunity to get to know each other, talking over snacks and refreshments. After receiving the consent to record the session with a voice recorder device, the author began the question round. Every participant had an opportunity to answer the questions, as they were asked one by one. During their answers they were not interrupted, and later other participants were free to share their comments and opinions, having an open discussion.

The questions used for the interview guide were similar to the ones the author prepared for the staff of Laurea UAS (Appendix 2). They included asking students about their experiences with integration into the university life, their relationships with local students and how well aware they are of supporting services that exist on campus. It was also asked how well aware they are of social integration activities, their opinion on importance of work of student associations (e.g. Laureamko, ESN Laurea etc.), suggestions on improvement of social integration support, and more. The interview was semi-structured, so more questions were asked during the session.

4.4 Survey

The third part to the conducted research was a survey shared between the international students of Laurea UAS. The author of the thesis has decided to use Google Forms web tools for creating the questionnaire (Appendix 3), as it allows free access to its functions, user-friendly interface and enough variety for creating needed answer options. Using online tools helped the author to receive a considerable amount of responses in a short time, which would be more difficult to achieve in a face-to-face format. It was also more convenient for the respondents, as they could choose to fill in the survey when it was most suitable for them. The online survey also provides basic analysis of the received results in a form of simple interactive charts, which will be presented in following chapters.

The survey contained 15 questions overall, several of those having sub-questions. The author of the thesis has used Likert-type scale for 12 questions in total, ranging the 4 answer options from “Disagree completely” to “Agree completely”. Conducting this survey has allowed to complete the qualitative research described in the previous subchapters by quantitative data. The last question of the survey openly asked the subjects to share their thoughts on the possible ways to improve the integration of international students in Laurea UAS.

The survey was conducted during 1 month in the spring of 2020, from 23rd of March to 22nd of April. Overall the author of the thesis has managed to collect and analyze 42 responses, both from Laurea’s degree and exchange students. The international degree students that agreed to fill in the survey were both from English- and Finnish-taught programs, but all of them having little to none of previous Finnish university experience. These students have started their studies at Laurea between 2015-2019. The majority of the subjects were enrolled and present during the conduction of this research. Results of the student survey will be shared and analyzed in the next chapter.

5 Outcome of the research

After conducting the interviews, the author of this thesis has carefully gone through the collected notes, as well as the voice recordings of the sessions. The questions weren’t based solely on the prepared interview guide but were also asked on a whim following the conversation. That is why it was rather convenient having the dialogues recorded and made it possible not to lose any important information and opinions shared.

The following subchapters will tell in detail about the outcomes of the research conducted by the author of this thesis. The research includes an individual interview with the international officer of Laurea, a group interview with 4 international students studying at Laurea and a survey.

5.1 Individual interview results

The first question asked from the international officer was about the current level of integration of the international students. If it was rather good, satisfactory or poor, based on the respondent's opinion and observations. As both the author and the international officer agreed that it would provide more accurate information if asking the students themselves, it also became clear that the integration is far from being perfect in Laurea. Based on the officer's words, and the feedback collected from the students, "It could be better". When talking about it, it was decided that defining international students would refer to the ones who came directly from another country with no Finnish background or knowledge of the language.

The second question was getting to know how Laurea UAS can assist the new international students. For example, if the student has just arrived in Finland one day ago, are there ways the university will support them, and through what activities? The orientation program and the introduction week were mentioned as good sources of support and integration them into the university life. One major point was the importance of explaining and teaching the new students the learning styles in Laurea, the expectations of them being independent and getting the information they need by themselves. As the learning styles can drastically differ in other countries, it is important to properly introduce the newcomers to it. This is a role of the university and the teachers to provide such support, but it also comes from the more experienced students and tutors.

The other important task for the introduction week is to provide the newcomers with the basic info on the everyday life in Finland. Such things as the public transport system, registration with the immigration office, bank operations, library system, student lunches may be obvious for someone who has been living in the country for a while, but the new students can struggle with. Two problems have been raised during the discussion. The first one being the amount of the information that the newcomers receive during the first week makes it very difficult to remember it all. One solution was offered to improve it, by providing the important information and details also on paper leaflets or online, so the new students can access it later. The second issue pointed out was the cases of student receiving their residence permits late due to Migri's work, and as a result arriving to Finland after the introduction week. This leads to students missing the crucial information and support, which they will need to discover later independently.

During the interview the issue of the cultural shock was also acknowledged. According to the respondent, most of the initial support for the new students is provided during their first months in the country - the so-called honeymoon phase, when everything seems to be exciting and new. Later in the year, unfortunately, the students are mostly going into the cultural shock phase, and that is exactly when it's so important to support and help them. And for this

period, it's not the new information that's so important to provide, but emotional support, having safe space and a person to talk to. That is why the peer support from the other students and tutors is so important. Unfortunately, many cases exist when the tutor students become too busy and cannot be as active as they used to be in the beginning, so often seeking support from them is insufficient.

Apart from the peer support, what is also important to have is the school support and wellbeing services. According to the respondent, these options are well-developed at Laurea, and the students always can seek help and support from the professional staff. It includes nurses and doctors, psychologist, a student social counselor, school priest, special education teacher and tutor teachers. As there is a variety of options, it is important to let the students know whom they should contact in different situations, and how to do it. Also, it was mentioned that in Tikkurila campus of Laurea the support services are shown through leaflets and posters. Unfortunately, during the conversation it became apparent that these support options are not marketed enough, so not all the students are aware of their existence. Moreover, the information provided in the students' intranet LINK can be confusing for some, as it is not always clear who the struggling students should go to with different issues.

Moving to the next question about the student associations and the ways they can help with integration, the respondent has mentioned the students' feedback. Student union Laureamko is a very popular organizer of student parties and cruises, but according to the international officer a lot of students were talking about not having enough non-alcoholic events. As not everyone is into partying, it is very important to organize something calmer, for example hiking, trips, sport events or baking and games hangouts.

When talking about the studies and study courses, it was revealed that many students, through their feedback, have mentioned the lack of mixed classrooms. It means that there are only a few possibilities for the Finnish and international students to study together, mostly in a form of an elective course. This makes it difficult for students to approach the others outside of a classroom, according to the international officer. Similar feedback was received both from domestic and international students. What can be done is trying to merge the courses that are doubled in both Finnish and English languages into one that is taught in English, for more accessibility and cultural variety within the groups.

During the interview the respondent has also mentioned the previous years' attempts of establishing the Multicultural Mentoring program and the Friendship Family program. Unfortunately, both were cancelled. A lot of students participating as mentors have lost interest in the course, together with having no time to be more active in it. It is a common problem of volunteering and cannot be easily fixed, so it will need more insight from the organizers and possibly Laurea UAS, in case this program will be reintroduced.

Furthermore, a similar new course was discussed - the Intercultural Competence (Figure 7). It was introduced in the Spring 2019 as an option for both international and domestic students to share their cultures and get to know about others', improve their teamwork in international environment, practice English and effective communication. This course was developed together with Laureamko and ESN Laurea, who had an opportunity to bring in new ideas on how to make the project more interesting, appealing and helpful for the students.

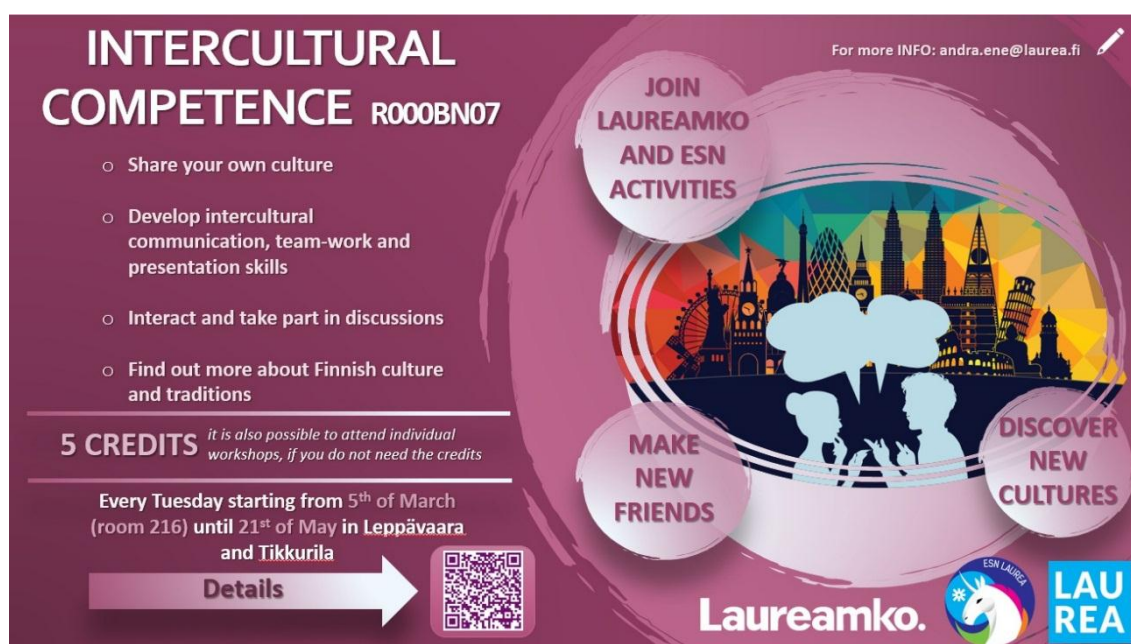


Figure 7: Intercultural competence course poster

The next question raised was about the ways the integration and integration activities may affect the studies and academic success of a student. The respondent has agreed that if a student struggles with their integration and the feeling of belonging, personal problems, finances or health, it will negatively impact their studies. It includes not only international students, but also the Finnish ones, or any student in that matter. According to the international officer, this topic of student wellbeing is taken seriously in Laurea and by its staff, including a specialized group that takes care of it. These people have a set of guidelines that help them to tutor, guide and support the students during their whole time in the university.

When moving to the next question and speaking of the Finnish students' side, the respondent has stated that it's not so easy to state whether they are interested in interacting with the internationals or not. This becomes more of a personal matter, as everybody has different personalities. It was also mentioned that some Finnish students have said that they were having a difficult time trying to befriend the international students, and vice versa.

Concluding the interview, the respondent has approached the question of possible new options or courses for improving the integration of international students. The one idea that was mentioned is the improved intercultural communication course open for both international and domestic students, where they can share their experiences, cultures and talk freely. The other opportunity was creating events where the students can share their culture to others. For example, it can be an international dinner where everyone brings food from their own country, a dance night where people can introduce the music and dances or just bringing or showing something that is important for their culture. Making these events a regular thing could increase their popularity and awareness across the students, help them make international friends and get to know other cultures.

The international officer has also given recommendations for the author of this thesis on continuing the research, accessing the student wellbeing surveys data, useful articles, webpages and sources for the topic of this thesis, as well as people to contact.

5.2 Group interview results

The first question that was raised during the group interview was asking the students to assess their own level of integration in Laurea. All 4 of the respondents have mentioned that they could use more positive interactions with the Finnish students. Most of them said they were satisfied with the support and services the school provides, but 2 of the respondents have mentioned that after the first year they were feeling more left out. During the discussion the students concluded that it happens because often the support and events of Laurea is concentrated on the newcomers during their first year. The peer tutors are always near and are ready to call you to a party, staff is always there to support, so the new students are being “forced” into the school’s society, and it is a good thing. But moving onto the second and third years, this support is getting weaker, the tutors are not as active anymore and the student starts to feel more isolated.

The second question was about the level of satisfaction when interacting with the local community. All the interviewed students have agreed that it also strongly depends on their own effort and the will to communicate with the domestic students. It is not always easy to put oneself out there and be a part of the community, but it will be rewarding to the person who does so. The exchange respondents have stated that they mostly interact with the exchange students from their own group. It is also affected by the fact that during their classes and assignments they very rarely meet people from the degree or Finnish programs. One of the students has participated in a study group where the majority were from the Finnish side and had very positive interactions with them. All the interviewed students strongly believe that having study courses together with the Finnish students could help them in integrating and getting to know the local culture, as well as becoming a part of the school’s community. Having little opportunity to study together leads to separation of international and local students

outside the classrooms. The respondents have stated that most of their friends are the ones that they got to know through their studies and having no lectures with Finnish students makes it difficult to start friendships outside the classroom.

The next question was highlighting the ways Laurea UAS can assist in adjusting to studying in Finland, especially on the first year. The respondents have highlighted the problem that appears during the first introduction week. Incoming students face an overwhelming amount of information during presentations, lectures and meetings on their first days on the campus. It makes it rather challenging to remember all important bits and pieces. However, it appears even this amount of information is not enough. The interview participants recall the lack of practical knowledge shared during their first days in Laurea UAS. Such things as public transport system, phone plan and Internet connection options, bank account and card opening, public libraries, second-hand stores and recycling centres, and many more may seem obvious for local students. Nevertheless, for someone who has arrived in Finland a day ago, these are essentials that need to be explained in detail. Unfortunately, some international students had to explore some or all these things on their own. One of the respondents arrived in Finland 2 weeks after the introduction and has missed most of the information provided. It was challenging to keep up with finding the information later. The other student has confessed that their tutor was present, but not helpful at all, so they were left in the same situation - finding the needed information independently.

The interviewed students also have come up with an idea of creating a “customer persona” for the tutors, so they would know better what exactly the international students will need and possibly struggle with. It was followed by an idea of a checklist that the tutors can follow, or even give to the incoming international students to make sure they will not forget any crucial steps like getting a travel card, getting to know the bank system etc.

The other question raised was inquiring students if they know which options Laurea provides for their integration and support, as well as possible additions. All the students have mentioned the lack of opportunities to get involved with the local society. For example, they were missing company visits, getting to know entrepreneurs and working with people outside the university. Also, the respondents would appreciate having more options to volunteer for animal shelters, elder people care or other similar places to see how the local community is working in real life. They would like to have an opportunity to get a hands-on experience that they could apply in professional life.

Speaking about the social integration activities that Laurea UAS provides, the students have mentioned that most of the events were parties or somehow connected to alcohol. The respondents would really like to have more educational, or more calm recreational activities, as well as trips and getting to know the local community without having to connect it to alcohol.

One of the respondents has an experience with an assistant of Laurea's psychologist. It appears the psychologist has an overwhelming number of students seeking support, and it is often impossible to book an appointment with them any sooner than a month ahead. This does not impact the students' mental health positively. It was offered by the respondents to have at least 1 more practicing psychologist in Laurea to ease the pressure on the current one, as well as providing the struggling students more opportunities for help.

When talking about the local students and communicating with them, there were several opinions based on different experiences. Some of the respondents have agreed that the Finnish students might be shy at times or not confident in using English, that's why it might be challenging to make friends with them. The other student has mentioned feeling alienated by the local students, especially in terms of language. Being a student tutor and having to communicate with Laureamko about the upcoming events and the introduction week, they often were receiving important information exclusively in Finnish. This can negatively impact the international student's motivation to volunteer and participate in school's life, as they feel foreign and outcasted.

Based on the author's observations, the participating students are interested in the topic of this research, so they were willing to share their personal experiences. All of the respondents agreed that there are areas that need improvement, and that their integration was not perfect.

5.3 Survey results

Out of 42 students who completed the survey, 50% entered Laurea in 2016, as can be seen from Figure 8. The second biggest group were students who started their studies in 2017 - they represented around 26%. Almost 12% began their Laurea journey in 2018, almost 10% did it in 2015 and 1 person (less than 3%) in 2019.

1. When did you start your studies at Laurea?

42 responses

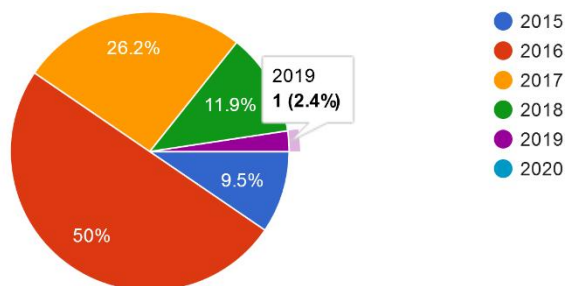


Figure 8: When did you start your studies at Laurea? (n=42)

The majority of the respondent group - around 83% - was completing a full-time degree taught in English (Figure 9). Almost 12% were exchange students, and only 2 people (around 5%) were from a full-time degree taught in Finnish.

2. Study programme type:
42 responses

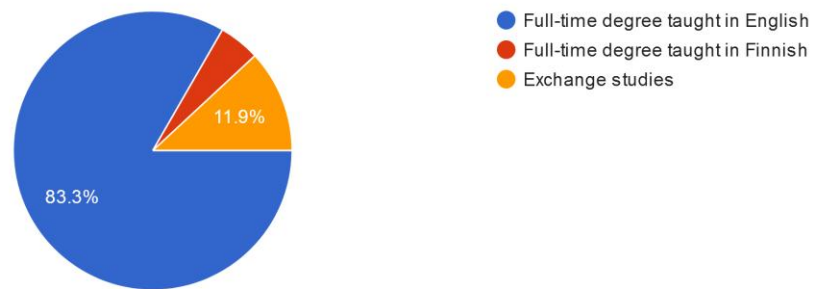


Figure 9: Study programme type. (n=42)

Out of 42 respondents, 27 students (64%) completely agree that they received enough accurate information about Laurea application process during the application period. 24% said to somewhat agree with this statement, while approximately 12% chose to somewhat disagree. None of the respondents (0%) has completely disagreed. (Figure 10.)

Only 17% of the respondents said to completely agree with receiving enough accurate information about the content of their studies during the application period. Almost 62% agree with the statement to some extent, and 21% would rather somewhat disagree with it. (Figure 10.)

When asked to rate receiving information about moving to Finland from another country during the application period, 19% of the respondents completely agreed it was enough. Around 41% said to agree with it to some extent. Meanwhile, 31% of the students disagree that they received enough accurate information. It is also the only topic of question number three that has received responses of complete disagreement - 4 people (almost 10%) said that they

completely disagree that the information they received about moving to Finland was enough. (Figure 10.)

3. I received enough accurate information from Laurea during my application period about:

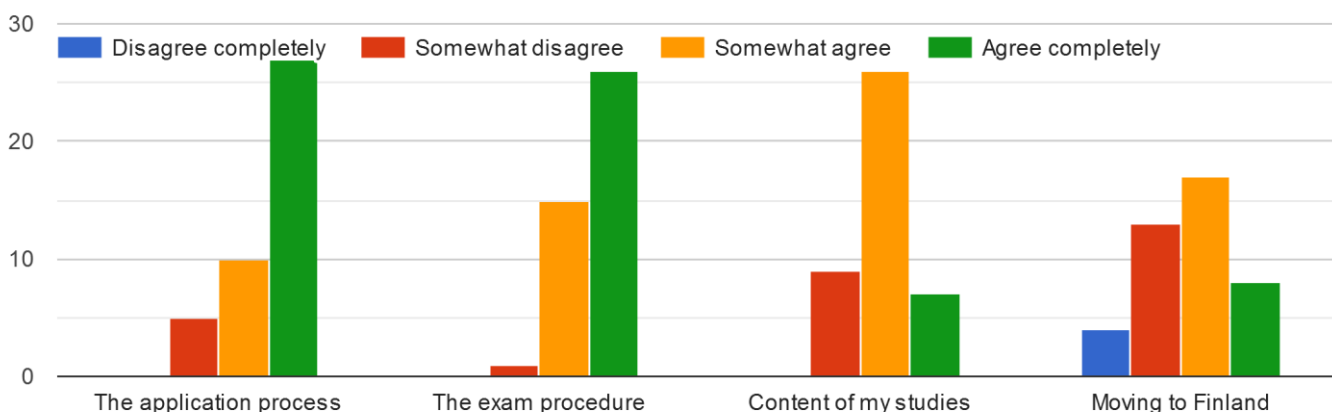


Figure 10: I received enough accurate information from Laurea during my application period. (n=42)

More than a half of respondents - 57% - somewhat agree with the statement that they received enough support from Laurea concerning legal matters (banks, migration office etc.). 31% said to disagree with it, and 2 people (5%) chose to disagree with this claim completely. Only 3 respondents (7%) of 42 completely agree. (Figure 11.)

When asked to evaluate the guidance received from Laurea about everyday life in Finland (SIM cards, the transport system etc.), the opinions got split in half. 17 students (41%) agreed with the statement, and 18 students (42%) disagreed with it. Only 7% said to completely agree, while almost 10% disagreed completely. (Figure 11.) Considering the information gained during the group interview with students, it is safe to assume such a divide in opinions was affected by human factor. As the respondents began their studies in different years, as well as different programs, they also had different tutors guiding them during the first weeks at Laurea.

The most positive feedback about getting support was received concerning learning of Finnish language. Majority of the respondents - 55% - said that they completely agree with having received enough guidance in their language studies. Close second - 38% - said that they somewhat agree with the statement. Only 2 people (almost 5%) said to somewhat disagree with receiving enough help, and 1 person (2%) chose to disagree completely. (Figure 11.)

Getting enough support with Laurea's education style has received the most of "Somewhat agree" responses. 30 people (71%) chose this option. 9.5% said to agree completely with the statement, while 19% rather disagreed with it. (Figure 11.)

Half of the respondents (exactly 50%) said to somewhat disagree with having received enough support from Laurea concerning accommodation, and 14% disagree with it completely. On the other hand, 31% somewhat agree with the statement, while only 2 students (around 5%) said to completely agree with it. (Figure 11.)

The last topic of the question 4 was about getting enough support from Laurea concerning finding a job in Finland. It has received the biggest amount of disagreeing responses. 50% of the students said to somewhat disagree with the statement, and 38% disagree with it completely. Only 5 respondents (12%) would say they somewhat agree with receiving enough support in job search. None of the students (0%) agreed completely. (Figure 11.)

4. I have received enough support and guidance from Laurea concerning:

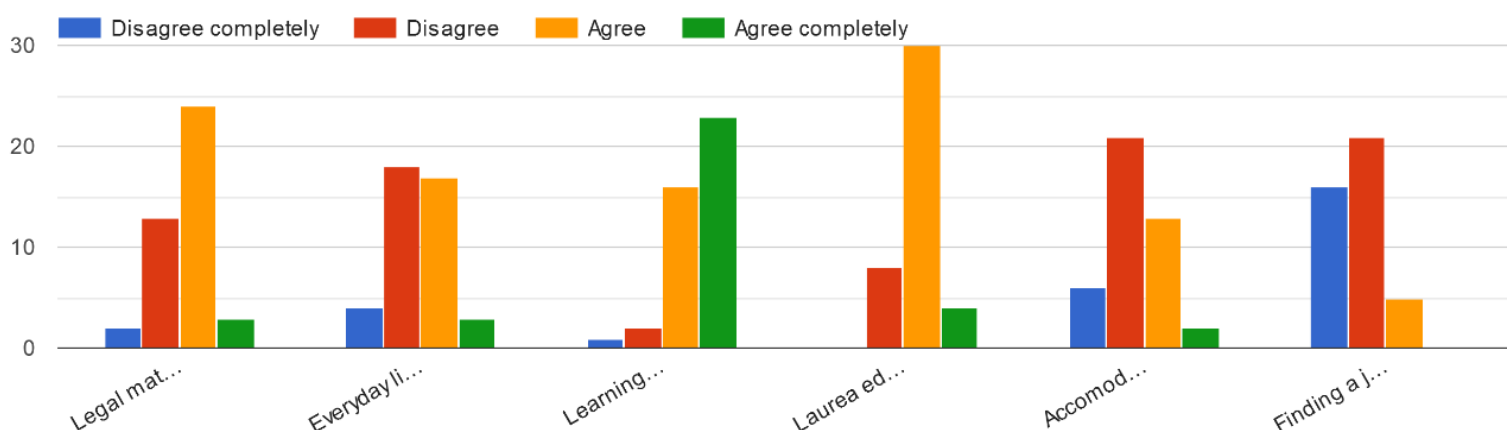


Figure 11: I have received enough support and guidance from Laurea. (n=42)

Majority of the respondents (around 52%) completely agree that getting employed in Finland is complicated, while 33% agree to some extent with the statement. Only 6 respondents out of 42 (around 14%) said to somewhat disagree with the claim. None of the students (0%) chose to say they completely disagree. (Figure 12.)

5. Finding a job in Finland is difficult

42 responses

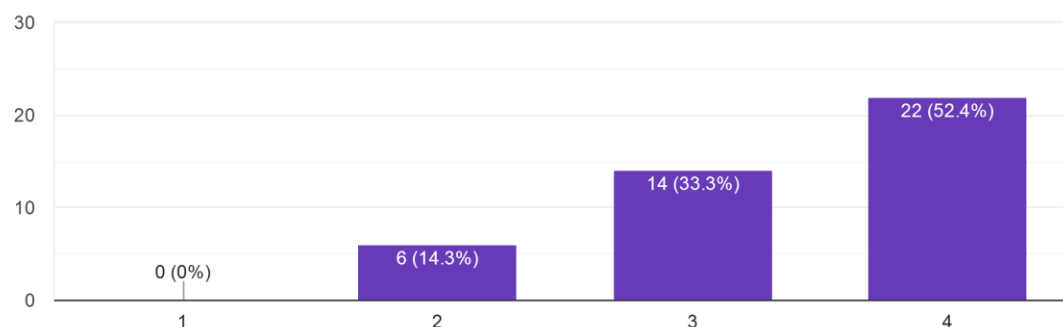


Figure 12: Finding a job in Finland is difficult. (n=42)

(1=Disagree completely, 2=Somewhat disagree, 3=Somewhat agree, 4=Agree completely)

Almost 60% of all respondents completely agree that Laurea's web pages provide enough information in English and it's easy to use them. 26% of the students said to somewhat agree with this claim, and only 14% chose to somewhat disagree. None of the respondents (0%) chose to disagree completely. (Figure 13.)

6. Laurea's web pages and intranet (LINK, Optima, Pakki) have enough information in English and it's easy to use them.

42 responses

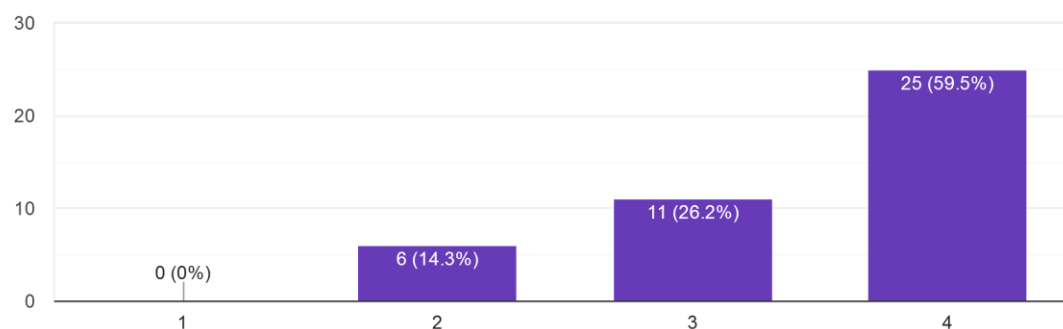


Figure 13: Laurea's web pages and intranet (LINK, Optima, Pakki) have enough information in English and it's easy to use them. (n=42)

(1=Disagree completely, 2=Somewhat disagree, 3=Somewhat agree, 4=Agree completely)

42% of the students completely disagree with a statement that most of the courses they find interesting are easily available in English at Laurea. Similar amount (40%) somewhat disagree

with it. 14% of the respondents said to somewhat agree, while only 1 student (around 2%) said to agree with the statement completely. (Figure 14.)

7. All/most of the courses I find interesting are easily available in English at Laurea:

42 responses

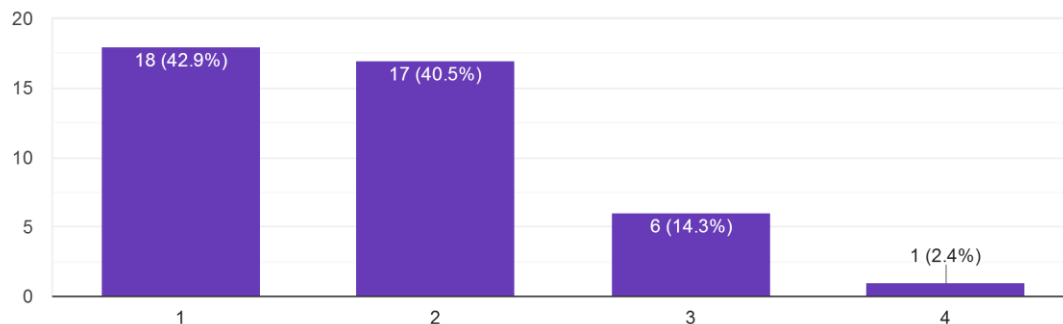


Figure 14: All/most of the courses I find interesting are easily available in English at Laurea.

(n=42)

(1=Disagree completely, 2=Somewhat disagree, 3=Somewhat agree, 4=Agree completely)

More than a half of all respondents (52%) agree completely that they feel welcomed and confident in Laurea, as well as feeling like they belong in Laurea's community. 31% somewhat agreed with the statement, while almost 17% chose to somewhat disagree with it. None of the respondents (0%) disagreed completely. (Figure 15.)

8. I feel welcomed and confident in Laurea, I feel like I belong in Laurea's community

42 responses

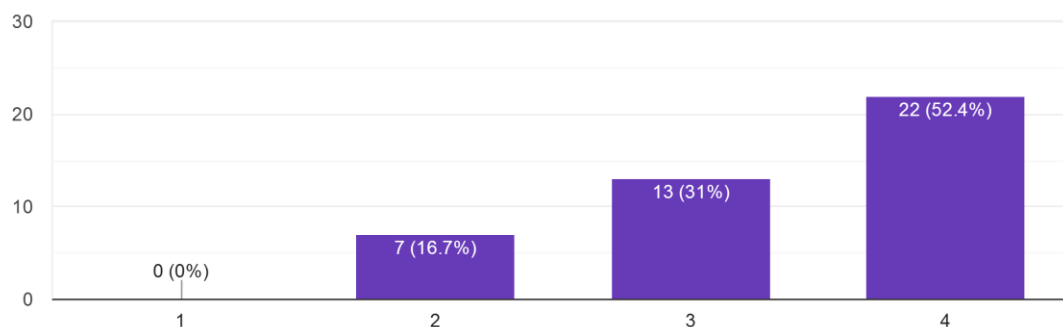


Figure 15: I feel welcomed and confident in Laurea. I feel like I belong in Laurea's community.

(n=42)

(1=Disagree completely, 2=Somewhat disagree, 3=Somewhat agree, 4=Agree completely)

Overall almost 86% of all respondents said that they feel supported and heard in Laurea, with 45% agreeing completely with the statement and 40% somewhat agreeing. Only 14% of the respondent students said to somewhat disagree. None of the respondents (0%) chose to disagree with the statement completely. (Figure 16.)

9. As an international student I feel like I'm being supported and heard in Laurea:

42 responses

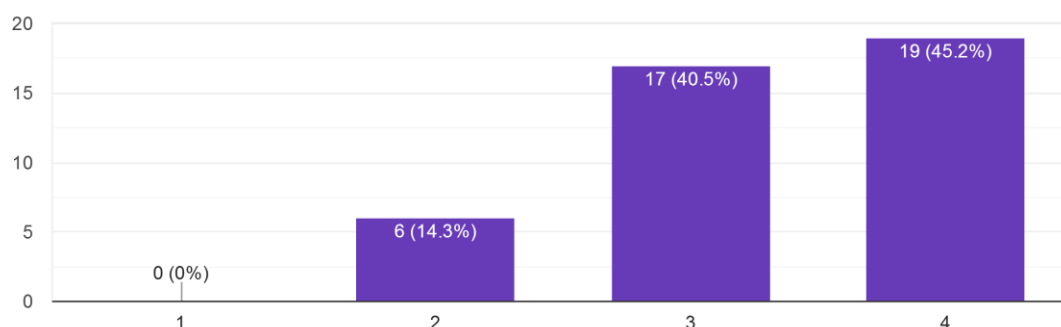


Figure 16: As an international student I feel like I'm being supported and heard in Laurea.

(n=42)

(1=Disagree completely, 2=Somewhat disagree, 3=Somewhat agree, 4=Agree completely)

Almost none of the respondent expressed having difficulties in communication with other international students due to a language barrier. 55% somewhat disagree with the statement, and 36% disagree with it completely. Only 4 respondents (10%) said to have communication difficulties with international students. (Figure 17.)

On the opposite, majority of the respondents experienced difficulties in communication with the local Finnish students. 60% of them somewhat agree with the statement, and 7% agree with it completely. 24% somewhat disagree with the language barrier causing difficulties, and 10% disagree completely. (Figure 17.)

Most of the respondents - 52% - somewhat disagree with the barrier making communication with the teachers and Laurea staff more difficult. 19% say they completely disagree with such a statement. Meanwhile, more than a quarter - 29% - said they rather agree with it. None of the respondents (0%) said they completely agree with the statement. (Figure 17.)

10. Language barrier causes difficulties in communication with:

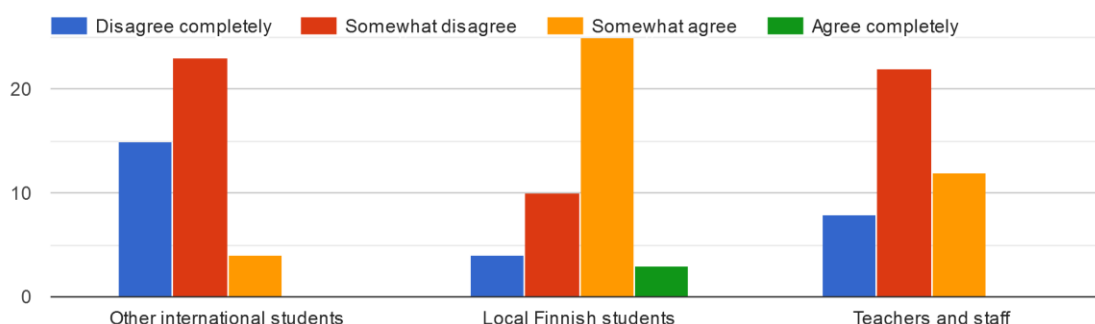


Figure 17: Language barrier causes difficulties in communication. (n=42)

Majority of the respondents agree that it is easy for them to make friends with other international students. 55% somewhat agree with that statement, while 40% agree with it completely. Only 2 respondents out of 42 disagreed with the statement. 50% of the respondents somewhat disagree that it is easy for them to make friends with the local Finnish students. 19% disagreed completely. Only 31% would say that they somewhat agree with the above statement. (Figure 18.)

11. It is easy for me to make friends with:

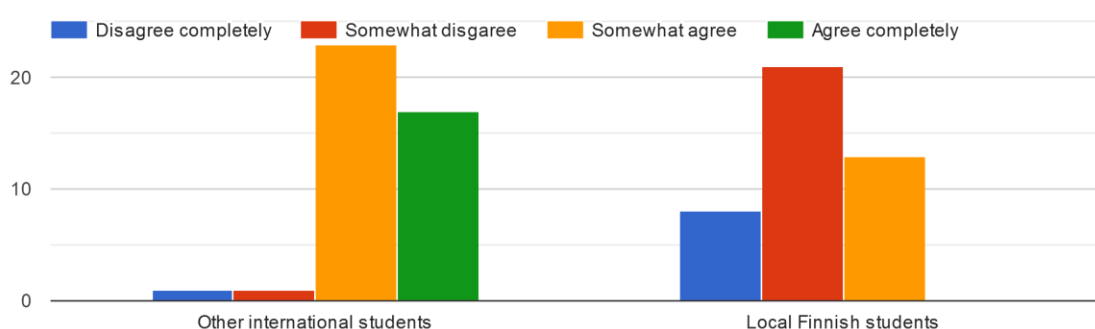


Figure 18: It is easy for me to make friends. (n=42)

Less than 5% of the respondents completely agree that Laurea and its organizations provide enough information about social events in English. 38% of the respondents say that they

somewhat agree with the statement. More than a half of all respondents disagreed with the statement, 14% disagreeing with it completely and 43% disagreeing to some extent. (Figure 19.)

12. Laurea and its organisations provide enough information about social events in English
42 responses

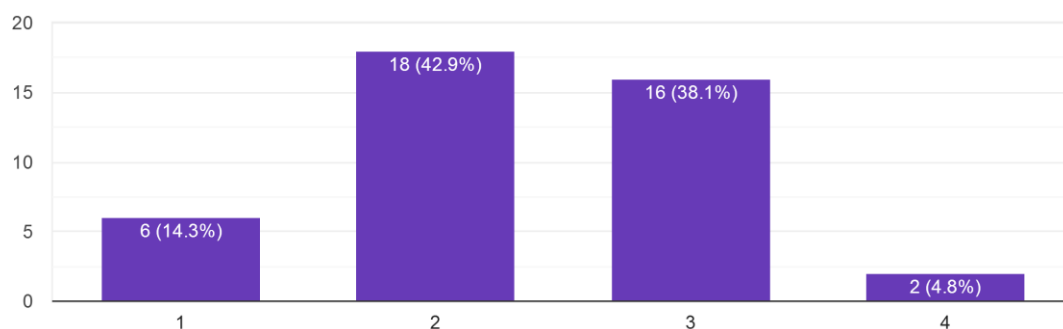


Figure 19: Laurea and its organisations provide enough information about social events in English. (n=42)

(1=Disagree completely, 2=Somewhat disagree, 3=Somewhat agree, 4=Agree completely)

More than a half of all respondents said that they have felt excluded due to some social events of Laurea only available in Finnish. 62% agree with this statement completely, while 21% agree with it to some extent. Only 17% said to somewhat disagree to experience feeling excluded, and none of them (0%) said to disagree with the statement completely. (Figure 20.)

13. I've felt excluded due to some social events of Laurea only available in Finnish/being marketed only in Finnish
42 responses

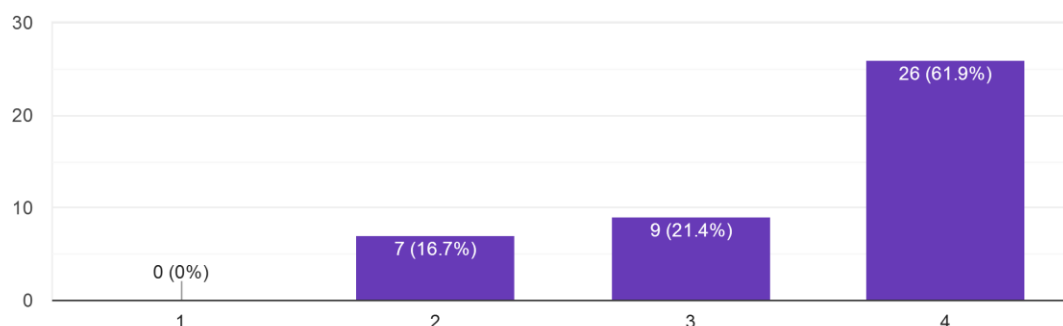


Figure 20: I've felt excluded due to some social events of Laurea only available in Finnish/being marketed only in Finnish. (n=42)

(1=Disagree completely, 2=Somewhat disagree, 3=Somewhat agree, 4=Agree completely)

21% of the respondents are highly satisfied with their current integration into Laurea's and Finnish societies. 43% are said to be satisfied with it. 26% claim to be not sure, and only 4 respondents (around 10%) said that they aren't satisfied with their integration. None of the respondents (0%) chose the option of being not satisfied at all. (Figure 21.)

14. How satisfied are you with your integration into Laurea's and Finnish societies so far?
42 responses

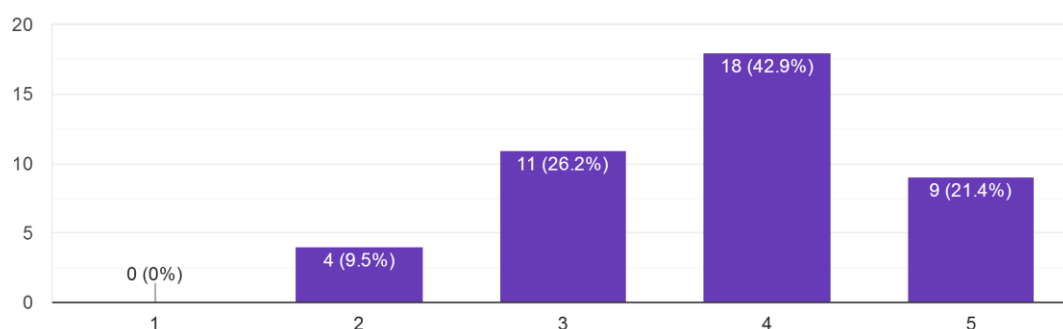


Figure 21: How satisfied are you with your integration into Laurea's and Finnish societies so far? (n=42)

(1=Not satisfied at all, 5=Highly satisfied)

5.4 Open question of the survey. Results

The last question of the conducted survey asked the respondents to suggest ways to improve current integration situation in Laurea. It also encouraged them to freely share their thoughts and experiences during their time at the university, as well as possible feedback on the current practices. Out of 42 respondents, 31 decided to answer the final question. Some of the received responses were expressing similar thoughts, so the author decided to share the ones of the most importance. Appendix 4 shows some of the answers to the question 15, showing the students' opinions on different topics. These responses were not edited in any way and are presented as is.

The first and most common topic of the students' replies was having intermixed courses together with the Finnish students at Laurea. The respondents agree that studying together with the locals can improve the overall integration, as well as help them feeling more comfortable in the Laurea's community. They also believe studying with the domestic students can improve both English and Finnish language skills on both sides. Out of 31 received responses to the last question, 25 have mentioned the intermixed studies or the lack of them.

Furthermore, several respondents agree on the fact that having more courses available in English would be beneficial for them. There is clearly a demand for more English courses, as many of the important topics are only covered in Finnish now. The students showed interest in supporting courses covering and supporting mental health and creative courses. A few responses from the students of Restaurant Entrepreneurship program mentioned not having an equivalent to the courses focused on the history and culture of drinks and dishes, while those are available in Finnish.

What can be also seen from the responses is the demand in social events that are not focused on consumption of alcohol. The respondents show their interest in sport events, hikes, various talent contests. The deficit in cultural gatherings available in English was overall mentioned by 17 students who replied to the open question.

Touching on another important topic, several responses have mentioned the introduction week and the information provided during the first days. The respondents believe it's important to create more strict guidelines for introducing the incoming students to Laurea and Finland. Several responses have expressed the lack of guidance specifically for the students coming from the outside of EU to Finland. The students believe more information on the housing, the transport system and similar everyday things would be useful.

As can be seen from the above, the recurring theme of the responses is having more courses available in English, having more mixed courses together with the local students and having more social events that are not focused on consumption of alcohol. Respondents also

expressed a need of more real-life projects with actual companies. Moreover, some students report experiencing poor guidance during moving to Finland and the introduction period, which further supports results discussed in the previous subchapter.

6 Recommendations

The previous chapters made it clear that there are several fields in the international students' experiences that have to be improved. The following subchapters will introduce the author's recommendations based on the conducted research and the received data and insight on the current situation in Laurea.

6.1 Courses and intermixing

The author recommends ESN Laurea to continue the research on what kind of English courses the students would be interested in participating. It can be done using one of ESN Laurea's social media pages (Facebook, Instagram, etc.) by asking the students to do a poll or a short survey. The students can be offered a small incentive for completing the task, such as stickers, a new overall patch, a discount for an event and so on. The research can be done in the beginning or at the end of a study semester. This way the participants will likely familiarize themselves with Laurea's study offer and possibly come up with new courses ideas.

ESN Laurea must work together with the official body of Laurea UAS in order to develop new courses or share ideas on the possible options. A good opportunity would be consideration of online courses. As a rule, they are less time-demanding and are more flexible, can be easily available to a large number of students and are possible to access from anywhere. Anyhow, online courses provide less direct contact and might be less effective in terms of integration as their face-to-face counterparts.

It is also recommended by the author to advertise the new courses both to the local students as well as the international ones. Using Finnish language will attract more attention from the locals and can increase the chance of them being interested in joining. Meanwhile, marketing in English is essential for most of the English degree and exchange students. Doing so can result in the higher chance of intermixed groups attending the courses. To ensure the actual working together and further integration, the lecturer can help to sort the participants into mixed groups. This way the local and the international students might find it easier to interact outside of class hours, since they've already worked together during the course.

6.2 The introduction week

The introduction week and the information provided for the incoming students should be supervised more carefully. The author of this thesis recommends ESN Laurea to cooperate with the student union Laureamko and the official bodies of Laurea UAS in order to improve the existing guidelines. It might be a good idea to work together on creation of a "Freshman

guide” that will feature all the important information on living in Finland for the students coming from abroad. Such a guide can exist in a printed or electronic form, so the new students could always have access to it in the time of need.

The author of this thesis recommends ESN Laurea to focus on providing the new students vital information about everyday life in Finland and/or in the city where the university campus is situated. The research shows that even though some things might seem self-explanatory to the local students, they are not always so obvious to someone who has just arrived in Finland. Important topics include the public transport system, phone and the Internet providers, recycling centres and second-hand stores, the student lunch subsidy system available nationwide, healthcare and social security systems.

6.3 Social events

ESN Laurea is strongly encouraged organising more social activities that won't involve the alcohol consumption. It is also recommended to include some educational points introducing the international students to the Finnish culture. It can be done through quizzes, explanations and interaction with the local students. The international students can be familiarized with Finnish nature, plants and animals during a day hike in a national park. An international dinner or a bake out would be good way to get to know the country through flavour. Sport and game events are a chance to teach and learn games from different countries and build a team spirit. Proposed events include, but not limited to organised trips to other cities, sport events, board game evenings, language cafes.

ESN Laurea is also encouraged to help the students to engage in volunteering and help the local community, as it was proved to positively affect their integration. As ESN Laurea is the youngest section in Finland, it is recommended to contact other ESN sections of Helsinki metropolitan region, as well as of the whole country. Many of these sections have more experience and previous projects involving volunteering. The author recommends initiating a collaboration with the other sections and work together on several volunteering events before organizing an independent one. This way ESN Laurea will gain valuable experience needed for guiding the international students in their volunteering. Such projects can include visits to the local animal shelters, organised clean-up days in the city after large celebrations, hosting a charity bake event and many more.

ESN Laurea is advised to promote its events both in English and Finnish languages to attract a multicultural audience and naturally assist the integration. The author of this thesis also recommends ESN Laurea to consult and cooperate with Laurea's officials in order to monitor the current integration situation at the university.

7 Conclusion

The main purpose and topic of this thesis was developing recommendations on how to improve the integration experience for the international students. To do so it was necessary to research the current situation and climate in the international community within Laurea UAS. The produced recommendations were suggested to be followed mainly by Erasmus Student Network Laurea, but also by other student organisations of the university.

Erasmus Student Network Laurea - or, shortly, ESN Laurea - is the case company of this research. It is a student-run organisation at Laurea UAS which was created to support international students and their mobility, as well as to improve the English-speaker accessibility at the university. Another reason to choose this company for the thesis is the author's experience in the works of ESN Laurea. The author was one of the founders of this association, as well as an active member throughout the years.

Analysing and reviewing the chosen books and articles has helped the author to receive enough understanding and knowledge on the topics of social and cultural integration. Doing so was crucial to understand the mechanisms of the students' integration and its importance on many levels, from personal to international. In addition to the theory obtained through the literature, the author has also run own research using two semi-structured interviews and a survey.

The conducted research has allowed the author of this thesis to get familiar with the international situation at the university. Providing an opportunity of openly sharing thoughts and experiences to the international students, the author has discovered several major problems that seem to be repeating themselves. They include the lack of intermixed courses with both international and Finnish students as well as a poor variety of courses taught in English. The respondents were also in favour of having more cultural and sport events accessible for English speakers. Moreover, they offered to review the guidance during the introduction week as it was lacking important topics.

As a result of this thesis the author proposes to Laurea UAS to acknowledge the existing issues and start implementing ESN Laurea to possibly improve them. It can be done by working closely together during the semester planning activities, the introduction week for the new students and maintaining the English-accessible environment. Joining forces with the student union Laureamko can provide the needed human resources, support and visibility for ESN Laurea and the international students.

The author of this thesis believes that following the proposed recommendations will improve the overall integration level and the students' experience within Laurea UAS. It will not happen overnight, but if ESN Laurea will follow through and work together with the university's

officials and the student union, the improvement is only a matter of time. Moreover, it will likely be followed by the increased sense of belongingness within the student community, and overall better wellbeing and academical success.

As a follow-up to this research, the author suggests conducting more surveys similar to one presented in this thesis. A reasonable choice would be doing it every year, especially after starting to implement the suggested in this paper strategies. Doing so will help to keep track of the changes in experiences and opinions of the international students, and their reactions to the changes.

References

Printed sources

Books

Hofstede, G., Hofstede, G.J. & Minkov, M. 2010. Cultures and organisations. Software of the mind. Intercultural cooperation and its importance for survival. 3rd edition. USA: McGraw-Hill Education

Hofstede, G., Hofstede, G.J. & Pedersen, P.B. 2002. Exploring Culture. Exercises, Stories and Synthetic Cultures. Boston: Intercultural Press

Paige, R.M., Cohen, A.D., Kappler, B., Chi, J.C. & Lassegard, J.P. 2012. Maximizing study abroad. A students' guide to strategies for language and culture learning and use. Second edition. Minneapolis: Center for advanced research on language acquisition

Ruane, J.M. 2015. Introducing social research methods: Essentials for getting the edge. Hoboken: Wiley & Sons, Inc

Strawser, M.G. 2018. Transformative student experiences in higher education. Meeting the needs of the twenty-first-century student and modern workplace. Maryland: Lexington Books

Trompenaars, F., Hampden-Turner, C. 2012. Riding the waves of culture. Understanding cultural diversity in business. 3rd edition. London: Nicholas Brealey Publishing

Scientific articles

Adams, W., 2015. Conducting semi-structured interviews. Newcomer, K.E., Hatry, H.P. & Wholey, J.S. (eds.) Handbook of practical program evaluation. 4th edition. Hoboken: Wiley & Sons, Inc., 492

Barton, E., Bates, E.A. & O'Donovan, R. 2019 "That extra sparkle": Students' experiences of volunteering and the impact on satisfaction and employability in higher education. Journal of further and higher education. Cumbria: University of Cumbria, 453-466

Glass, C.R. & Westmont, C.M., 2014. Comparative effects of belongingness on the academic success and cross-cultural interactions of domestic and international students. International journal of intercultural relations. Volume 38, 106-119

Electronic sources

British Council, 2014. Integration of international students - a UK perspective. Accessed 21 May 2019.

<https://www.britishcouncil.org/education/ihe/knowledge-centre/student-mobility/report-integration-international-students>

Erasmus Student Network. Accessed 15 May 2019

<https://esn.org/about>

Erasmus Student Network Finland. Accessed 20 May 2019

<https://www.facebook.com/esnfinland/>

Laurea curriculum. Accessed 19 August 2019

<https://ops.laurea.fi/index.php/en/en>

SocialErasmus. Accessed 12 August 2019

<https://socialerasmus.esn.org/what-we-do>

SocialErasmus Facebook. Accessed 14 August 2019

<https://www.facebook.com/socialerasmus/>

Spencer-Oatey, H., Dauber, D. & Williams, S. 2014. Promoting integration on campus: Principles, practice and issues for further exploration. UKCISA with the University of Warwick. Accessed 5 June 2019.

<https://www.ukcisa.org.uk/Research--Policy/Resource-bank/resources/70/Promoting-Integration-on-Campus-Principles-Practice-and-Issues-for-Further-Exploration>

Figures

Figure 1: ESN structure (Erasmus Student Network 2017)	7
Figure 2: ESN sections of Finland during National Platform Lappeenranta on 11th of March 2018 (ESN Finland 2018)	10
Figure 3: SocialErasmus project timeline (SocialErasmus 2016)	14
Figure 4 Social inclusion days statistics (SocialErasmus 2017)	15
Figure 5: Culture shock and adjustment U-curve (Madrid Metropolitan 2017).....	18
Figure 6: The "Cultural iceberg" (SOPTV ED, 2017)	19
Figure 7: Intercultural competence course poster	27
Figure 8: When did you start your studies at Laurea? (n=42)	30
Figure 9: Study programme type. (n=42)	31
Figure 10: I received enough accurate information from Laurea during my application period. (n=42)	32
Figure 11: I have received enough support and guidance from Laurea. (n=42)	33
Figure 12: Finding a job in Finland is difficult. (n=42)	34
Figure 13: Laurea's web pages and intranet (LINK, Optima, Pakki) have enough information in English and it's easy to use them. (n=42)	34
Figure 14: All/most of the courses I find interesting are easily available in English at Laurea. (n=42)	35
Figure 15: I feel welcomed and confident in Laurea. I feel like I belong in Laurea's community. (n=42)	35
Figure 16: As an international student I feel like I'm being supported and heard in Laurea. (n=42)	36
Figure 17: Language barrier causes difficulties in communication. (n=42).....	37
Figure 18: It is easy for me to make friends. (n=42)	37
Figure 19: Laurea and its organisations provide enough information about social events in English. (n=42).....	38
Figure 20: I've felt excluded due to some social events of Laurea only available in Finnish/being marketed only in Finnish. (n=42)	39
Figure 21: How satisfied are you with your integration into Laurea's and Finnish societies so far? (n=42).....	39

Appendices

Appendix 1: Interview questionnaire (staff)	49
Appendix 2: Group interview questionnaire (students)	50
Appendix 3: Survey questionnaire	51
Appendix 4: Open question student responses	56

Appendix 1: Interview questionnaire (staff)

Integration of international students in Laurea UAS

Hello! My name is Anastasia Sevalneva and currently I'm studying Restaurant Entrepreneurship in Laurea University of Applied Sciences. Right now, I'm in the process of writing my thesis about integration of foreign students in our university.

This is an interview for staff of Laurea University of Applied Sciences conducted to determine the level of integration of foreign students and possible strategies to improve it. I don't want to miss any of your comments, so I will be recording our session. All responses will be kept confidential. The results of this interview will be used in my thesis and possibly will help to find better ways to integrate international students in Finnish society and school life.

1. How would you describe current level of integration of international students in Laurea UAS? Is it good? Satisfactory? Poor?
2. How could the University assist international students to adjust to studying in Finland?
3. Do you think the university provides enough options for students' integration and support? Could there be more? What about student associations (e.g. Laureamko, ESN Laurea etc.)?
4. What social integration activities do you believe are available for our students?
5. Do you think these activities help students to succeed in their studies?
6. Based on your observations, would you say that Finnish students are interested in interacting with international students? What about the other way around?
7. Do you have any ideas that could help in Laurea UAS? For example, new courses or activities that could be introduced?

Is there anything you would like to add or ask?

Thank you for your time!

Appendix 2: Group interview questionnaire (students)

Integration of international students in Laurea UAS

Hello! My name is Anastasia Sevalneva and currently I'm studying Restaurant Entrepreneurship in Laurea University of Applied Sciences. Right now, I'm in the process of writing my thesis about integration of foreign students in our university.

This is an interview for students of Laurea University of Applied Sciences, conducted to determine the level of integration of foreign students and possible strategies to improve it. I don't want to miss any of your comments, so it's possible I will be recording our session. All responses will be kept confidential. The results of this interview will be used in my thesis and possibly will help to find better ways to integrate international students in Finnish society and school life.

1. How would you describe your level of integration in Laurea UAS?
2. How satisfied are you with your interactions with the local community?
3. How does the University assist you to adjust to studying in Finland?
4. Do you know which options does Laurea provide for students' integration and support?
Which options would you add? What about student associations (e.g. Laureamko, ESN Laurea etc.)?
4. Do you know what social integration activities are available for you? (e.g. celebrations, hangouts etc.)?
5. How these activities can help you to succeed in your studies?
6. Would you say that Finnish students are interested in interacting with international students? What about you interacting with them?
7. Do you have any ideas that could help in Laurea UAS? For example, new courses or activities that could be introduced?

Is there anything you would like to add or ask?

Thank you for your time!

Appendix 3: Survey questionnaire

International Students' Integration. Laurea

Hello! My name is Anastasia Sevalneva and currently I'm studying Restaurant Entrepreneurship in Laurea University of Applied Sciences. Right now, I'm in the process of writing my thesis about integration of international students in our university. This is a survey for students of Laurea University of Applied Sciences, conducted to determine the level of integration of international students, support provided by the school and possible strategies to improve it

***Required**

1. When did you start your studies at Laurea? *

- ☐ 2015
- ☐ 2016
- ☐ 2017
- ☐ 2018
- ☐ 2019
- ☐ 2020

2. Study programme type: *

- ☐ Full-time degree taught in English
- ☐ Full-time degree taught in Finnish
- ☐ Exchange studies

3. I received enough accurate information from Laurea during my application period about: *

	Disagree completely	Somewhat disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree completely
The application process	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The exam procedure	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Content of my studies	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Moving to Finland	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

4. I have received enough support and guidance from Laurea concerning: *

	Disagree completely	Disagree	Agree	Agree completely
Legal matters (migration office, bank etc.)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Everyday life in Finland (transport system, SIM cards etc.)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Learning Finnish language	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Laurea education style	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Accommodation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Finding a job	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

5. Finding a job in Finland is difficult *

	1	2	3	4	
Disagree completely	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Agree completely

6. Laurea's web pages and intranet (LINK, Optima, Pakki) have enough information in English and it's easy to use them. *

	1	2	3	4	
Disagree completely	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Agree completely

7. All/most of the courses I find interesting are easily available in English at Laurea: *

	1	2	3	4	
Disagree completely	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Agree completely

8. I feel welcomed and confident in Laurea, I feel like I belong in Laurea's community *

	1	2	3	4	
Disagree completely	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Agree completely

9. As an international student I feel like I'm being supported and heard in Laurea: *

	1	2	3	4	
Disagree completely	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Agree completely

10. Language barrier causes difficulties in communication with: *

	Disagree completely	Somewhat disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree completely
Other international students	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Local Finnish students	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Teachers and staff	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

11. It is easy for me to make friends with: *

	Disagree completely	Somewhat disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree completely
Other international students	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Local Finnish students	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

12. Laurea and it's organisations provide enough information about social events in English *

	1	2	3	4	
Disagree completely	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Agree completely

13. I've felt excluded due to some social events of Laurea only available in Finnish/being marketed only in Finnish *

	1	2	3	4	
Disagree completely	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Agree completely

14. How satisfied are you with your integration into Laurea's and Finnish societies so far? *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not satisfied at all	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Highly satisfied

15. How do you think Laurea could improve the integration of international students? E.g. more social events, more information and support in English, more courses together with local students... *

Your answer

Appendix 4: Open question student responses

There are lots of interesting courses but it's only taught in Finnish. therefore, I can't join it, and because our class doesn't have any local Finnish students so it's kind of difficult to integrate or make friends with the local people. I hope we would have more joined-classes with other Finnish at the beginning of the semester (it's easier when everyone hasn't known each other, after that they've already belonged to different circles and it's hard to blend in)

I feel like a lot of very interesting courses are only available in Finnish, even when the description or the name of the course is in English. It would be amazing if those would be available for everyone, and not just Finnish-speaking students.

If the lectures are given in Finnish that are told not to be available in English should be made available for the students in English, atleast the teacher should be able to explain well in English

More social events and more courses together.

More sports **events** rather than drinking events

I would like to have more cultural events that are not focused on alcohol or parties. Like hikes, talent contests, sport events etc.

I would really like more social events that aren't just drinking parties.

I've seen a lot of Laurea's events (some of Laureamko gatherings, Flow restaurant theme weeks etc.) only marketed in Finnish, so even if I was initially interested in joining, I felt like I wouldn't be welcomed there.

Even though my program is in Finnish, I would feel more comfortable having more courses in English, and especially mixed courses both with local and international students. I think that would benefit everyone and make the process of integration smoother,

I am exchange student, so I only spent in Laurea 1 semester. But I think it would be nice to make more events where Finnish and international students can join together. It is much easier to make friends this way. Also I wanted to study more together with the locals, but there wasn't many courses to choose from.

More mixed courses with Finnish students would be nice

More projects with Finnish students!

I think what we really need is more real projects with actual companies. This way it would be easier to get real experience and network with people. In my programme we didn't have a lot of opportunities with it, and many people that I know would like to have it.

More fully mixed courses, strict guidance and requirements for tutors to provide needed information to newcomers, perhaps, even something like a "freshman handbook"

Laurea could have provided more information about the moving process for someone who is coming from outside EU. I feel they gave me the basic information they would have given to a student coming from within the EU and it did not help me at all. I did not get any information on housing and transport from Laurea. I had to ask a tutor about it and even they didn't make it information enough for someone who is coming from outside the EU.